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FANTASTIC, Stories of Imagination, Vol. 12, No. 4, April 1963, is published monthly by Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, at 434 South Wabash Avenue, Chicago 5, Illinois. Subscription rates: U.S. and possessions $3.50 for 12 issues; Canada and Pan American Union Countries $4.00; all other foreign countries $4.50. Second Class postage paid at Chicago, Illinois and at additional mailing offices.

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FANTASTIC
STORIES OF IMAGINATION

APRIL 1963
Volume 12 Number 4

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF

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Illustrating *Some Fabulous Yonder*

SUBSCRIPTION SERVICE: All subscription correspondence should be addressed to FANTASTIC, Circulation Department, 434 South Wabash Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. Please allow at least six weeks for change of address. Include your old address, as well as new—enclosing if possible an address label from a recent issue.

EDITORIAL CONTRIBUTIONS must be accompanied by return postage and will be handled with reasonable care; however, publisher assumes no responsibility for return or safety of art work, photographs or manuscripts.

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According to you...

Dear Miss Goldsmith:

On line 16, page 75 of the January issue of FANTASTIC Stories you have committed an etymological horror. No one is surprised to see such monstrous construction in the daily press or on television, but, really, you should know better. To be sure, natives of Mars are Martians, but the inhabitants of Venus are emphatically NOT Venusians. They are Venereans! As any semi-literate savage knows, the third declension noun Venus takes its objective and adjectival form from the stem Vener-. In a like manner, we obtain general from genus, and opera from opus. The rule is completely genusian in Latin.

I am sure we both agree that there is not necessarily anything venereal about a Venerean, nor anything jovial about a Jovian.

You do have an out, Miss Goldsmith. You can hide behind the name of an equivalent deity, but the goddess most closely corresponding to Venus is the Greek Aphrodite. For some strange reason, I fear that you timid neologists at FANTASTIC are as frightened of aphrodisiac as you are of venereal.

Frank Curl
2372 Florencita Drive
Montrose, California

● *Have you been following the learned discussion of this subject in these pages? As Websters' Third Edition has it, what is in use, is right, even if it isn't grammatical. And did we ever tell you the story about the Saturnine Saturnian?*

Dear Editor:

Today, as I was on my way to the dentist's, I stopped into the local store to buy the January copy of FANTASTIC, which I hoped to read in one of those abominable things called subway trains.

On the way back from the den-

(*Continued on page 127*)

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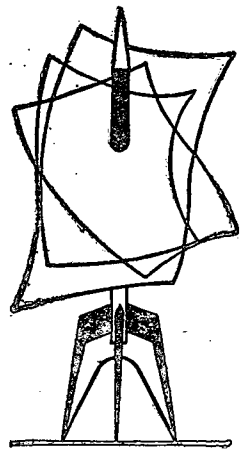
THE world is statistic-happy, these days, and no one is particularly impressed unless the statistic is in at least nine digits. For instance, one of the newest high-speed data transmitting systems will now send 33,000,000 words a minute over a TV line. Or, if you wish to put it even more impressively, it will send 20,000,000 "bits" of information per second. Then there is that new electronic X-ray plate developed in England that can take 10,000 X-ray pictures in a row before it loses its sensitivity.

But to American manhood a more modest statistic looms even more important. A new stainless steel safety razor blade (which will, by the time you read this, be available in the stores) is capable of giving eight—count 'em, eight—shaves before the edge dulls. That's the kind of scientific progress that hits home!



* * *

On a less pedestrian level are the names of some of the "hardware" that American scientists will be shooting into orbit in the next few years. Everyone who's anyone knows all about Apollo, Relay, Dyna-Soar and those other old-hat satellite programs. But are you hep to the acronyms in your future? Here are some that will keep you up-to-date, make you the first in your neighborhood to know what's going on Up There:

Nimbus—the weather satellite that will follow Tiros.
Aeros—the ditto that will follow Nimbus.
Ranger—program for a "hard landing" on the Moon.
Surveyor—ditto for a "soft landing" on the Moon.
OAO—orbiting astronomical observatory.
OGO—orbiting geophysical observatory.
OSO—orbiting solar observatory.
Advent—multichannel microwave communication system.
Bambi—missile detection and destruction satellite system.
Slomar—vehicle for satellite supply and rescue work.
TSX—commercial communication satellites.
Vela—satellites to detect nuclear explosions (theirs, not ours).
Voyager—the Mars probe.

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No man had yet survived a landing on the black planet, till Raspold dared to venture his body and his mind in the cavern of Voittamaton, where the draco-centaurs gazed at . . .

Some Fabulous Yonder

By PHILIP JOSÉ FARMER

Illustrator BRUNO

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RASPOLD was in a tavern in Breakneck, capital city of the Federation planet, Wildenwooly. He was drinking, but only in the line of duty. The bartender had some very interesting information for him, and Raspold was elated. He was finally getting some place; the trail, once so cold, was now warmer.

Then, a messenger (from Saxwell Space Links) walked into the tavern and handed him a sealed envelope. He tore it open and read. The message was in code and was to the point.

JOHN CARMODY TURNED HIMSELF IN AND IS NOW AT JOHN HOPKINS REHABILITATION CENTER. REPORT AT ONCE TO ME.
R.A.

Four hours later, Raspold was talking to his chief, Richard Ali'i. He had had to wait at the spaceport of Breakneck for two hours for a scheduled ship. The trip between Wildenwooly and Earth—20,000 lightyears—took, in wristwatch time, ten minutes. He spent an hour going through Customs and Sanitation. Another hour was consumed in taking various taxis and tubes to the headquarters of the Chief of Federation Extra-Terrestrial Criminal Apprehension Bureau (FECAB). This was deep within the bowels of Under Copenhagen.

Richard Ali'i was a big, handsome man of middle age, dark-skinned, black-haired but with blue eyes (Samoan and Norwegian immediate ancestry).

"Whatever made Carmody surrender?" asked Raspold. "You sure he hasn't got some nasty scheme up his sleeve?"

"Thought of that. But his turning himself in seems to be genuine. Apparently, he was on Dante's Joy. Strange things happen there. Remind me to tell you about it sometime. Now, we've got something that can't wait."

He paused, lit up a Siberian cigar, and said, "It's about No. 2. Rather, I should say, No. 1, now that Carmody's, uh, abdicated."

"Heinrich Nge?"

"Yes. I've had ten agents on his trail for the past four years, as you know. Five of them have disappeared recently. Two were murdered. One is off somewhere. I can't get hold of him, maybe he's been done away with, too. The tenth . . . well . . . he was bought."

Raspold was genuinely shocked. "A Fecab?"

"Thoroughly screened. But tests are given by human beings, and human beings are . . . fallible. The evidence is undeniable. McGrew took a bribe, sold out to Nge. We'd never have known if he hadn't been badly hurt in a drunken brawl in Diveboard. Under drugs, he babbled like a maniac. Not for long. Something in his body exploded, blew him to bits, killed a doctor and a Metro

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inspector. The explosive must have been surgically implanted. And set off by remote control. McGrew was in no condition to do it himself, even if he'd wanted to."

DIVEBOARD?" said Raspold. "Then Nge, or one of his men, must be on that planet. The bomb must have been set off by radio."

"We think so. However, I'm not through yet. McGrew in his babbling told us something we would never have known otherwise. You remember the disappearance of the Federation destroyer *George A. Custer* two years ago?"

"Between Earth and Aldebaran?"

"Yes. Maiden voyage. Thirty men aboard. Translated from Earth, was supposed to appear above Einstein ten minutes later, ship's time. But she never did, and no one knew what happened. Now, we know Nge highjacked her."

"Highjacked?" Raspold's brows arched in surprise. "If I didn't know you so well, sir, I'd think you were kidding."

"I wish I was. No, Nge did the impossible. Or improbable. With one man. A member of his organization who had contrived, somehow, to become a crew member. He released a deadly gas through the ventilation system of the destroyer, thus killing all the crew except himself. Then, he piloted the bird to a rendezvous at some planet McGrew didn't name, and turned the *Custer* over to Nge. Must have been a damned good pilot. He did the translation all by himself."

"So, what's he going to do with the *Custer?*" said Raspold.

"I don't know. Or didn't. We fed this new data into ATHENA. And ATHENA, after checking this against what it knew about Nge, came up with a reasonable, if astonishing, probability. Maybe not so astonishing, considering Nge."

Raspold wanted to urge Ali'i to continue, kill the suspense. Instead, he waited restlessly.

Ali'i said, "Voittamaton."

"Voittamaton?" Raspold repeated aloud. "Wait a minute! I got it! Fifty years ago. . . . Miika Versinen . . . sure . . . I saw a dramatic re-creation of his life. Ran as a three-part series. And, of course, I read about him when I was a kid."

He looked at Ali'i as if he still thought Ali'i was joking. "You mean Nge's going to use the *Custer* to storm Voittamaton? Even after Versinen failed so miserably and so bloodily?"

Ali'i nodded grimly.

Raspold raised his hands and shrugged his shoulders. "We won't have to worry about him any longer. Or any of the men with him. Why not let him go?"

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"Because, in the first place, we don't know for a certainty that that is what Nge plans to do. It's only a high probability. Second, Voittamaton is tabu, off limits. Third, we have to stop Nge now before he hurts innocent people while preparing for the expedition against Voittamaton. Fourth, I want our department to get him—now. There are about ten Federation agencies of Earth alone trying to catch him, and the Great Light alone knows how many from other Fed or non-Fed planets."

Raspold nodded thoughtfully, I'd like to see the blackguard get his comeuppance, which he will, if he tackles Voittamaton."

"That," said Ali'i, "is what we're aiming for and I think you're best qualified to do it."

TWENTY minutes later, Raspold had sketched his plan, received his authorization and a draft for 5,000 C, and was on his way. It took an hour for him to get back to the port. In the meantime, one of Ali'i's secretaries had arranged for a seat on a nonsked jumper. Because Raspold was going to Diveboard, a non-Federation "open" planet, he had to have a passport. Ali'i's secretary had given him a forged one bearing the name of Dick Ricoletti. Ricoletti was, presumably a subcitizen of the Middle North American Department, Lifelong Limited Privileges Resident of Lesser Laramie. Raspold had spent some time in that city and could speak the dialect quite well. Not that he expected to run across anyone acquired with it but he liked to present a perfect character.

His passport carried his portrait, his fingerprints, retinaprints, earlobeprints, blood type, EKG-patterns, and voiceprint. When Customs and Sanitation took these and matched them against the passport's, they would discover nothing wrong. And, when they wired the prints to ATHENA for double checking, they would receive from ATHENA assurance that the prints belonged to Dick Ricoletti. What Customs and Sanitation did not know was that, when the inquiry about Ricoletti was plugged into ATHENA, it went to a data block that had been inserted by the FECAB.

Raspold leaned against a wall and smoked a cigarette while waiting for this procedure to be completed. He was a tall man, about 12 centimeters above average height (1.7 meter), but looked taller because of his thinness. His broad and thickly muscled arms and shoulders and chest contrasted strangely with the girlish thin waist, narrow hips, and slender legs. He was wearing an auburn wig with a high-piled curly coiffure of the

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latest fashion. His eyes, normally a deep brown, were now a dark purple. The wig and contact lenses had had to come off during customs inspection, but no one had commented. Almost every passenger wore them.

His features were as Nature had given them; no surgeon's knife or plastiflesh for him. His forehead was high; his eyebrows, black and thick and meeting over the nose; his nose, big and thick, like a bloodhound's. The lips were medium sized and had only a smudge of lipstick and that red, not the fashionable green flecked with gold. On his left ear, he wore a huge golden ring with a large goldengreen pendant.

PRESENTLY, he walked out with the other passengers to the *Willowisp*, a twenty-seater craft belonging to a small line. The pilot, however, was a retired Federation Navy navigator. After the passengers were seated, the pilot gave his usual description of the trip they would make; the translation of 180,000 light-years in exactly nothing flat (objective and subjective time), the shorter translations, and the time it would take to fly to Diveboard's spaceport after the final "jump."

Raspold paid no attention; he had heard similar lectures over a hundred times. The passengers demanded his concentration. After examining each in minutest detail, he decided that they were what they seemed to be. A couple of import agents going to Diveboard to set up business, and the rest, emigrants. These mostly came from the subclasses, men and women who could no longer endure the crowded apartments and jammed streets of the great enclosed cities, the low standard of living, the tribute paid from their meager wages to local politicians and their thugs, their ratings as lower class citizens (which their children might escape but not them). They had scraped enough money together to buy the expensive tickets to the faroff sparsely settled planet on the rim of the Galaxy (enticed by TV-shows of life on that planet), agricultural equipment, tools, guns, clothes, and whatever else they thought they might need. Now, they were facing a new life, ill-equipped, most of them, for the strange life on the frontier planet. But they all had dreams of some fabulous yonder, some place where there would be no formal classification of social and economic scale, more than enough fresh air to breathe, silence, trees, grass. And where they would be their own men and women.

Raspold felt sorry for them. They would find that what they had regarded as chains on Earth were, in many ways, walls to pro-

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tect and guide them. Now, chain-naked, helpless, or inadequate, unsure of how to act. And their life would be hard, hard beyond their powers of conception.

He thought of Versinen. Miika Versinen. Transplanted into English from the Neo-Finnish of the colonial planet Toivo, Micah The Bloody. Versinen was the first and the greatest of the space pirates. A yellow-haired bearded giant who looked like an ancient Viking. He carried a broad axe at his belt, a weapon useless in warfare but quite adequate for splitting his prisoners' skulls in half. He was a madman but a successful one. Until he heard of that dark planet beyond the rim of the Galaxy. The sunless body traveling outwards toward Andromeda. An Earth-sized planet bereft of atmosphere, seemingly devoid of life from its beginnings. Yet, there were mysterious structures on its surface. Over a million of them, pillars with globes on their ends. They glowed; they looked like an army of phantoms.

THE first Federation expedition to attempt to explore—a Naval force of a destroyer, a tender and a laboratory-carrier had failed. Ten kilometers above the surface, the power in all three vessels had been cut off, and the ships crashed. The crews were killed except for a navigator. Finding that the power was now restored, he had escaped in a one-man hopper and succeeded in translating back to Diveboard, the nearest planet.

A second Federation force tried to land. The power of all six vessels was cut off while they were still in orbit. Then, restored. The fleet had left, and the planet was marked off-limits.

But Versinen listened to rumors, to wild tales. The inhabitants of the dark runaway possessed great powers and great riches. The man who conquered them would be the most powerful and the richest being in the Galaxy. Versinen decided he would be that man. Recklessly he brought his fleet of ten vessels out of translation only a kilometer above the surface and dived to the surface before his power could be extinguished. Three of his vessels miscalculated, for the translation drive was not as accurate at that time as it was now. Two crashed. One translated below the surface, and there was an explosion that left a giant crater and thousands of the globed pillars flattened to the ground.

What happened after that is for speculation. Two of the pirate fleet still lie where they landed, several kilometers from the cavern's mouth. The third, the *Kirves*, was located in orbit around Diveboard; its only occupant, Versinen. He was mumbling and nonresistant. For a

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long while, all he could distinctly say was, *"Voittamaton! Voittamaton!"*

"Unconquerable! Unconquerable!"

Later, at John Hopkins, he quit talking and became catatonic. All efforts to arouse him failed. For ten years, he was a blob. Then, one day, he opened his eyes, and he gave a thin scream.

"I don't want to die!" he cried. "I can't! I must not!"

He muttered, "They're both horrible. But life is better."

A few minutes later, he was dead.

The pilot's voice brought Raspold out of his reverie. They had made the final translation 50 myriameters from Diveboard's surface. From now on, they would proceed by gravitic drive.

AN hour later, Raspold was through the lax Customs of Diveboard and walking its streets. It was high noon over Copenhagen and almost dusk here.

He walked slowly to give the impression of a man out on a sightseeing tour. He wondered if he should contact the agent Ali'i had told him about. How did he know he could trust Jack Yee? He knew of the man, but he did not know him personally. And, while Ali'i, was not likely to make a mistake about a man, he could. Yee might have been all right until Nge got to him and offered him a large attractive bribe. Raspold decided to see what he could do on his own.

He found that, aside from the uneasiness of his situation—and he was not one to be thrown into a sweat easily—he was enjoying his stroll. The city of Diveboard was much like Breakneck, the capital of Wildenwooly. It was built of a medley of log structures, of quickdrying foam shells supported by sprayed beams, a few buildings of native stone: granite, limestone, or prestressed concrete, roughly dressed planks, even of paper impregnated with hardo. The streets were the only evidence of planning. These were wide and ran straight and crossed each other at right angles. Some, those nearest the spaceport, were paved with the cheap and quickly laid hardo. The rest were dirt.

The men who thronged the streets were a varied lot. Many were recent immigrants from Earth, but there were also human beings from the colonial and independent planets: Toivo, Tserokia, Novaya, Big Sudan, Po Chui, Heinlein, Maya, Last Chance, Goibniu, and two dozen or more others. A minority among the human beings, but not rare, were oxygen-breathing nonhumans. Sinister (to human eyes) Felicentaurs from Capella, the huge

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Ursucentaurs of Ross 128 III, feathery bipedal Gkuun from Taurus IV, pygmy Flickertails from Van Houden, a big-turbaned Pachydermoid from Puppis. And a near-human type with slanted purple eyes and bulging cheekbones of which Raspold had never heard.

The men who jostled each other on the paved and the dusty streets came from many social classes and professions. Richly dressed merchants and obvious tourists; commercial spacemen in their blue, white, or gold uniforms; poorly dressed farmers or ranchers; buckskin-clad hunters or prospectors; and the nondescript. There were a few gravity-fed units coasting through the streets or high in the air, some electrical fuelcell-powered modes of transportation, and even a nuclear-powered truck. By far the most popular modes of transportation, which gave an archaic air to the scene, were the buggies and wagons drawn by the furry equinoids of Diveboard. Whatever the immigrant could afford to import from Earth, he drove. And, if he didn't have the money for a Terrestrial means of travel, he used the native resources.

RASPOLD saw a chair sitting on a sidewalk. Beside it was a sign in big black letters in Lingo: LEG-PAINTING. ¼ S. A LEG. Below was a name in English: JIM QUINN, PROPRIETOR. Standing beside the chair, his tool of trade on a small table beside the chair, was a medium-sized, chunkily built youth with bright orange hair—his own, judging from the shagginess—and a toothy smile. Raspold said to the youth, "I have long legs. Going to charge extra for them?"

Quinn grinned and said, "No, sir. Anything I lose on you, I'll make up when a fellow with short legs comes along."

Raspold sat down and placed his right foot on the short stool provided. Quinn took a bottle of clear liquid from his table and squeezed a shot of the liquid into a cloth in his other hand. Then, he began rubbing Raspold's right leg with the damp cloth. The red, white, and blue barberpole stripes painted on Raspold's limb ran together. After Quinn had wet a large area, he took a dry cloth and began to rub the area. The pale flesh beneath began to show.

"Earth?" said Raspold.

"Middle Dublin, 3rd Sector, sir," said Quinn. "My parents were second-class C, although my old man got First before he did. Played the bassoon in the Greater Dublin Symphony for twenty years. Me, I have no musical talent. Back to second C for me until I was a majority. Then, to third. But my mother taught me

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to read and write. And you know there's lotsa second-C that can't do that. Finally, got tired of no money, being shoved around. And cubehappy. Couldn't stand being crowded all the time, couldn't breathe any more. Then, luck, pure blind dumb luck! Stepped into a public bath and found a dead man. Some old guy that musta been slumming; he had some M's in his purse, so he couldn't have come from the Middle Sector. Musta had heart failure. No one else in the place. I took the M's and runned. Used some of the credits to find out where I could get hold of an outlaw jumper. Paid most of my M's to the agent and the pilot and took the jump to here with ten others. Landed with just enough money to buy me this chair, stool, table, and leg-painting tools. But I'm doing O.K. now. Someday, I'll be a big man on Diveboard. And I can breathe, I can breathe."

"You don't miss the big city and all its refinements?"

"Sometimes. You know, the gang, the girls. But I wouldn't ever have amounted to anything; I'da always been a drunken C. Here, things get tough, rough, you gotta fight like hell sometimes. But what the hell, you had to back on Earth."

RASPOLD examined his legs and said, "You're doing a good job. Paint them black. Solid. No stars or crescents."

Quinn looked up, winked, and said, "You dint really need a paint job, sir. What's on your mind?"

"You must get around, hear a lot," said Raspold. "There's two S for this job if you can give me a little information."

"I come happy for two S," said Quinn, grinning bucktoothedly. "Yeah, I hear, see. But it might cost you."

"There are people in this city who have money. Where do their women—wives or what have you?—go to buy their clothes, get their wigs cleaned and curled, get a sono?"

"Rene Gautier's," said Quinn. "Best place in town. Only place, in fact."

"You just earned 3 S," said Raspold. "Now, you've probably set up your business near Gautier's. . . ."

"Yeah," said Quinn, grinning. "He's my only competitor. But not really a competitor, because only the fullpurses can afford him. But I place my chair near him a lot, because I like to see the dangoes that waltz in and out. Some pretty goodlookers."

"That's what I want to know," said Raspold. "Has one of Gautier's customers ever been a beautiful woman who uses Erector Set Perfume?"

"What's that?"

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"A natural perfume from Umchawa. Used to be, anyway. It's been synthesized but is still by far the most expensive. The man who smells it has an immediate erotic reaction, if he's at all capable of one."

Quinn hawhawed. "Yeah, I smelled it twice, both times when I was working in front of Gautier's. The first time, I didn't think anything of it, the woman was such a dish. Second time, I was painting a customer's legs when she went by, and he told me what it was. I couldn't figure out why a woman would be wanting to have it on her when she was walking on the streets. You'd think she'd cause a riot . . . get. . . . Say! Maybe she *was* walking the streets! Naw, she dint have to, she was too beautiful, too well dressed."

"How tall was she?"

"Oh, about an inch or two higher than I am."

"Lots of jewelry?"

"Loaded."

"She comes to Gautier's regularly?"

"Not that I know. I saw her last Thirdsday and a Secondday two weeks before. Say, that's enough. I've given you more'n 3 S' worth."

"Five S now. Tell me a little more, and it's six. Was she alone?"

"Once. Other time, she had another woman with her. A blastoff, too, but she wasn't wearing that Erector Set stuff."

RASPOLD took six S out of his purse and handed it to Quinn. He said, "You're an intelligent man, and, therefore, curious. You must have asked around about this woman."

"What for? What chance would I stand with a woman like that? Maybe someday, after I make my pile . . . Yeah, I asked around. Nobody knows her name, and Gautier sure isn't going to give out any information. The tight-lipped little fairy. But I can tell you one thing that'll be at least worth a half-S. Haw, haw! She don't live in town."

"Half it is," said Raspold. "What does she ride in?"

"Believe it or not, a horse and buggy," said Quinn. "A Diveboard horse, not one of the Earth kind. She drives like a maniac. But it ain't hers. She rents it from Tak Alvarez; he's got a livery stable out at the edge of town. I painted his legs a coupla days ago. He says she walks in from the forest, from nowhere, and rents the outfit. Then, coming back from Gautier's, she leaves the horse and buggy with Tad, and walks off into the forest. So . . ."

Somebody could be waiting for her in a grav, thought Raspold. He said, "Many people live in the country around here?"

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"More every day. Diveboard's population has doubled in the last ten months. Mostly poor would-be farmers or hunters or prospectors."

"Any rich ones?"

"A few. There're two nobody knows much about. Word is that they're big-shot criminals who've piled it and want to take it easy. Which they can do. Earth can't touch them; this's a Free Planet."

"I know. Now, what're the names of these so-called criminals?"

"Nobody knows the name of one of them. The other calls himself Gottfried von Fulka."

Quinn knew no more than that about von Fulka. Except that his house—mansion, rather—was on an island in a lake about 80 kilometers north of the capital. The house was built about two years ago; von Fulka had not moved in until a year later.

"Alvarez' livery? It's on the north side of town?"

"South."

Raspold rose and examined the paint on his legs. "Very good," he said. "You'll go far in your profession—whatever it may be in the future."

"Another S-worth of advice," said Quinn, squinting shrewdly at him. "If you're thinking of hanging around Gautier's until this chick shows up, forget it. Gautier goes to her now."

Raspold's brows, thick and black, rose and he said, "You earned it. How do you know this?"

"Oh, I get around."

"Details, please," said Raspold, holding out, not an S but an Un with a large M on it.

QUINN'S eyes widened, and he said, "Gautier drives a long red Wang. He's easy to spot, even late at night, especially here where lotsa people stay up all night for one reason or another. He's driven out on the North Road twice about two in the morning and didn't show up until the next night. Where'd he go? That road ain't passable for a sport car once you get ten km. outta town. And he ain't shacking up with no farmer's daughter. If he was, everybody in town'd know it. No, he parks his car someplace, and somebody picks him up. The Erector Set chick hasn't shown after she made those two trips, so. . . ."

"The mountain goes to Mohammed. Or vice versa."

"More advice. Gautier may be one of the boys, but he's a hard nut to crack; he came here because he got into some trouble on Earth."

Raspold handed him the M and said, "Part of that is for silence. And loyalty in the future. I want you to work for me. More where that came from."

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"How do you know you can trust me?" said Quinn. "I want to get ahead, and I know I need money for that. Suppose . . ."

Raspold shrugged. "I'm taking a chance. But those who betray me. . . ."

"I'll hitch my wagon to your star, mister. . . .?"

"Call me Dick Ricoletti for the present," said Raspold. "It wouldn't be good for either of us if you knew my real name. And I warn you, even talking to me as you have been doing may be very dangerous."

"If I scared easily, I wouldn't be here," said Quinn.

Raspold asked where the best restaurant in town was and then walked off. He strolled through the bustling colorful noisy streets, following Quinn's directions, until he came to The Soulful Cow. This establishment, a two-story building of rough-hewn logs of a reddish wood, was a combination tavern and eating-place. A blast of chatter and laughter blew from out the open doorway, with a mixed odor of tobacco, beer, and frying steaks. Raspold stepped into a huge room filled with people and smoke. The great dark-red beams overhead were festooned with heads of native animals and signs in various alphabets, ideograms, and syllabaries. A bar, cement-topped, ran the length of the northern side of the building. Men stood two or three deep along it, and over a dozen bartenders sweated to keep their customers from dying of thirst. At the rear was the kitchen, open to view, and here were the cooks, their helpers, and waiters, preparing the only course The Soulful Cow served; steaks, potatoes, butter, beans, and a dark bread.

RASPOLD's mouth watered. He had had steak on Wildenwooly, but it had been his first in an Earth month. On Earth, he could rarely afford true meat, but here, where cattle was one of the chief industries, and transportation from the plains to the city was not so expensive, he could have all the steak he wanted.

Raspold found an empty seat at one of the long plank tables. The waitress came over and he ordered a stein of native dark beer with his meal.

While waiting Raspold took special note of a man who sat directly across from him. This fellow was easily the biggest human being in the place. Also the broadest. His forearms looked as thick as Raspold's thighs. His chest looked like two drums of muscle. His hair was black and straight, and the handsome face was brown. His eyes were a light green. He sat brooding, his huge right hand almost completely enfolding the stein of beer.

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From time to time, he took a swallow from the stein. As he did so, he green eyes looked at—and through—Raspold. Yet Raspold was sure that the big man had taken in every detail of Raspold's face and dress.

Presently, a youth came in and bent down by the big man and whispered into his ear.

Raspold was startled, for the youth was the red-haired leg-painter, Quinn.

Quinn, straightening up, gave Raspold a wink and a grin, and he walked away. Raspold wondered if Quinn meant these for a friendly greeting or a signal that this man had something to do with his quest.

RASPOLD rose and strode after Quinn. He caught him just outside the tavern, out of sight of anyone sitting within it.

"You working for that dark giant?" he said.

"Sorry," said Quinn. "I don't tell one of my clients another's business. It ain't ethical. It also ain't healthy."

"How much?" said Raspold.

Quinn's face, lit by a lamp above and to one side of him, darkened.

"You haven't got enough," he said.

Raspold laughed and said, "That tells me a lot about you. Maybe I can trust you, after all. O.K. I'll find out for myself. But you can do something for me. There's a Q in it for you. You know a man of Terran Chinese descent named Jack Yee? I don't know where he lives just now; he moves around a lot."

Quinn nodded, and Raspold took a notebook and a pen from his purse, tore out a leaf, and began writing. Finished, he handed the leaf to Quinn.

"I could get into contact with him right now, but I don't want to use the waves. And I've got some business to take care of first. When you see him, don't say a word. Just hand him this paper. Got it?"

"His place might be bugged?"

"Right. And don't bother trying to read this. It's in code."

"You must be on Heinrich Nge's trail," said Quinn.

Raspold had trained himself to keep a poker face, but he could not help betraying some surprise. "How do you figure that?"

"I hear a lot, see some. Word's around that he's here somewhere on Diveboard. A coupla his men seen in town last few months. And the word also is that Raspold's in town, hot on Nge's trail."

Raspold smiled slightly and said, "communications engineers ought to investigate the possibility of the grapevine. For swiftness, it beats the speed of light. Well, now you know you're in hot water up to your neck, and you're

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likely to get drowned. Want to back out?"

"It's exciting," said Quinn. "And I got a chance to make a big profit."

"I don't think you mean a profit from Nge," said Raspold. "As soon as you've delivered the message to Yee, come back here and wait for me."

Quinn walked off, and Raspold returned to his seat at the table. By then, his dinner was before him, and he ate it with great pleasure. His enjoyment was not a bit tempered by the hard stares the big man across the table was giving him. When Raspold had paid his bill and rose to leave, the big man also stood up. Raspold walked out of the tavern, aware that he was being followed.

DIVEBOARD'S moon, almost as large as Earth's, shone fitfully through a half-clouded sky.

"Mister," said a rumbling voice behind him. "A word."

Raspold turned around, noting that the man was keeping his distance. If he intended to attack, he meant to do it with a weapon. Raspold idly fingered the pendant on his ear-ring.

The fellow spoke in Lingo but used strange phonetic values that showed he had not learned it as an infant along with his native tongue but in later life.

"My name is Big Chuck Woodwolf," he said, not offering his hand. "I'm a Tserokian."

Raspold said, "I've been to Tserokia."

Woodwolf flashed a smile and said, "You speak my language?"

"Regretfully, no. My name is Ricoletti. What do you want?"

"O.K. We'll use that name, though I think I know who you really are. Listen, you heard of the big raid that Heinrich Nge made on Sequoyah a year ago?"

Raspold nodded. Sequoyah was the capital city of Tserokia, a T-type planet colonized seventy years before (when interstellar travel had first started) by several thousand Cherokees. Since then, the population had expanded to thirty million, largely through the immigration of other racial groups and nationalities. The immigrants had become naturalized or, as the Tserokians phrased it, "adopted," and had learned to speak Cherokee. But that tongue was now dying out, replaced by the standard Federation speech, Lingo. The racial continuity of the orginal colonists (already half-white) had been broken. Big Chuck himself was probably descended from at least three races and two dozen nationalities. But he thought of himself as Cherokee.

Two years ago, six months after the destroyer *Custer* had been highjacked, a fleet of ten vessels had appeared over Se-

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quoyah. The *Custer* was one of them. Before anyone knew what was happening, the fleet had landed, looted the planetary treasury, the government art museum, and had also kidnapped a number of Tserokian women. There was no doubt about the identity of the leader of the pirates. Heinrich Nge. He had left a letter saying that he had enjoyed his visit there, thanked them for their gracious hospitality, and promised to return when their treasury was refilled. Also, complimented them on the beauty of their women. The letter bore the image of the scorpion (*Nge* was Swahili for *scorpion*).

"My sister, Tuli, was one of the girls taken by the pirates," said Woodwolf. "She's the most beautiful woman I've ever seen; she was to marry the richest man on Tserokia. He's dead now; killed by the pirates during the raid. I loved my sister."

"Why tell me this?"

"Because I figure you're looking for Nge, too. You know some things I don't. I know some things you don't. If we work together. . . ."

Raspold considered. Woodwolf might be an agent of Nge. He could be approaching him with this story with the intent of capturing him. If so, he might give Raspold a chance to find Nge.

"Would you be willing to submit to questioning under *chalarocheil?*" said Raspold. "I'm not one to take unnecessary chances."

"Yes."

"In that case, it may not be necessary. Let's go some place else and talk."

RASPOLD merely walked across the street and stopped before the dark front of a farm equipment store. They were outside the illumination area cast by the nearest lamp, and he could watch the door to The Soulful Cow. Big Chuck Woodwolf began talking at once.

"I went to Wildenwooly, Diveboard, Peregrino, Liang, Krona, all the 'free' planets. I figured that Nge might be found in a place where the Feds could not legally touch him. Then I went to Earth several times and also visited a dozen non-human planets. No luck at all.

"Then, instead of just running around, sniffing here and there like a dumb hound trying to find a lost trace, I sat down and did some thinking. If I were Nge, where would I go? And why? Nge wants to be the biggest man in the Galaxy. He wants power and wealth. How can he best do this? By looting the biggest treasury in the Galaxy, that's how. And what is that? Voittamaton, if you believe all you hear.

"But Voittamaton is well-nigh invulnerable. So, if Nge needs

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men, ships, weapons to take Voittamaton, he will steal the ships and rob some place to give him the money to buy men and weapons. So, he highjacks the *Custer*, and he loots Sequoyah. He now has money and firepower. But he also needs a base of operations. What inhabited 'free' planet is closest to Voittamaton? Diveboard, on the rim of the Galaxy, and only ten lightyears from Voittamaton."

Raspold smiled. This man, using the little mass of gray matter within his skull, had come to the same conclusion as the skyscraper-tall computer, ATHENA.

"I came back here. I hang around taverns, the marketplaces, find out who knows the most, tap into the grapevine. I even became partner in some small robberies here to get the confidence of the underworld. I'll repay the men I robbed after this is over. I got a conscience.

"One night, while I was hanging around the Twelfth Street Tavern, a man I recognized entered. I didn't know his name, but I couldn't forget that face; we'd blazed away at each other during the raid on Sequoyah from opposite ends of a hall. He wounded me with his rifle, almost killed me. Now, I could reach out and get his neck between my hands and squeeze once. Instead I buddied up to him. Pretended I was a planetpicker who'd tried to keep a planet to himself and been cashiered out of Federation Service. Down on my luck. He was cagey at first, but he got drunk, and he said he might possibly have something for me to do—if I was made of strong stuff. Wouldn't say any more, and I figured that he wasn't likely to. I knew that the little device in his body might be transmitting our conversation to some monitor who only had to press a button and blow both of us to kingdom come. He knew it, too.

SO, I told him that The Soulful Cow was a better place for steaks, drinks, and women, and we staggered out into the street. When we came opposite the entrance to an alley, I chopped him alongside the neck and dragged him back into the dark end. When he came to, he was bound tight and had a gag over his mouth. I used my little flash to show him what I'd written on a piece of paper. It told him what I wanted to know. What was his name? Where was my sister? Where was Nge?

"He had one hand free so he could write an answer. He wasn't about to try to speak. If his speech was being monitored, he wouldn't live more than a minute. Neither, probably, would I, but I had to take the chance. I had also written that, in return for the information, I'd let him

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loose. I knew he wouldn't say anything to Nge, because Nge would kill him. He wrote his answer. *'Go to hell.'*

"Brave talk. But I took his sandal off and ignited my cigarette lighter and held the hot wire between his toes. He didn't dare scream. I took the wire away and gestured to him to write. He must have made up his mind then, for he began to scribble. He let the paper fall, I picked it up and read.

"My sister was still alive; Nge had taken her for one of his mistresses. She was pregnant. She was at Fulka's place. He didn't know where Nge was, for Nge often took off for visits elsewhere.

"I asked him some more, by paper, of course. Where Fulka's place was? Who was Fulka? Did Nge intend to attack Voittamaton? He wrote that Nge was Fulka."

Woodwolf stopped talking. He was breathing heavily.

"So what happened?" said Raspold coolly.

"I'd promised to let him go free," said Woodwolf. "And I did. I untied him, after relieving him of a knife and a gun and knocking him out again. Then, I phoned the police but didn't give my name, of course. Told them that I'd seen Howard Guy and another man at the end of that alley. Guy was tied up; the other man was writing something on a piece of paper and showing it to Guy, and Guy was doing the same for him. I even told them about the hot wire between Guy's toes."

"You said that you'd let him go free," said Raspold. "Was that . . . ?"

"I'm not through talking yet. The police didn't get hold of Guy; I knew they wouldn't. I kept my word. It wasn't three minutes after the call that a big explosion took place right in the middle of Twelfth Street. Fortunately, nobody but Guy was involved.

"You see, I know, like everybody else, that Nge has his contacts in the local police force. Maybe the one I called up. The contact must have radioed Nge, and Nge wasn't taking any chances on Guy spilling anything."

THEY started to walk down the street. But, hearing the frenzied barks of a dog and the equally frenzied cries of a man, they turned. Two blocks behind them, a youth ran as fast as he could, shouting for help. Several yards behind him bounded the dog, a large black mongrel that looked as if he had a heavy dash of German shepherd in him.

"Looks like Quinn," said Raspold.

"Yeah," said Woodwolf. "And that dog . . ."

He broke the magnetic clasps

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of his shirt with his left hand and with his right reached under the shirt. Raspold, having previously noted the bulge under his left armpit, was not surprised to see the hand emerge clutching a pistol.

"Damn, damn!" groaned Woodwolf. "Quinn's in the way."

"What's the matter?" said Raspold.

"Has to be one of Nge's dogs," said Woodwolf. "Nge must have stolen some piece of clothing from Quinn and set the dog to track down the owner."

Raspold saw the picture. He drew his gun, a .32 Weckel, and ran diagonally across the street. He shouted, "Quinn, out of the way!"

Quinn saw them and must have understood. He sprinted for the sidewalk nearest him, which was Woodwolf's side of the street. Raspold, aiming carefully, pressed the trigger.

The gun bucked twice, and the dog went whirling sidewise in the dust. Quinn kept on running. Meanwhile, Big Chuck Woodwolf had run into the middle of the street, and he fired immediately after Raspold. The dog, crumpled in a heap, moved a few inches under the impact of the .45. Quinn dived into an alley between two buildings. Woodwolf, only a few meters from the dog, threw himself flat on the dirt. Raspold, suddenly realizing his vulnerable position, did the same.

He was deafened, and the ground trembled under him. Dust swirled into the street; the plastic sheet of the store window near the dog blew inwards in a solid sheet, and the crash of objects falling off the store shelves was in the ears of the three as they rose and sped down the street.

After running for several blocks, they stopped beside the side of a building. "Don't your citizens get nervous with all these explosions?" said Raspold, gasping for breath.

"They love excitement," said Quinn. Then, "That was close! But I'm O.K. Listen, Mister Ricoletti, I couldn't deliver your note! Your friend Jack Yee was dead! I went to his room, on the second story of Krishna's Hotel, and I knocked. There wasn't any answer. The door was unlocked. I hollered again, cause I dint want my head blown off. Still no answer. I pushed the door, it swung in, and there was Yee on the floor. He was dead but from what I don't know. Poison, maybe, or gas. So, I got to hell out of there with your note still in my hand."

"Nge must have discovered his identity," said Raspold. Now, as far as he knew, he was the only FECAB agent on Diveboard.

I WAS walking back," said Quinn, "when a car drove by. It stopped, and a door opened,

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and the dog jumped out. He stood there a moment, whining and sniffing. Then, like a hound out of hell, he ran for me, barking. I ran, and the dog came after me. Something told me I better not stop and try to talk to him. You showed up, and . . ."

He paused, then wailed, "Nge's after me, too!"

"He won't get you unless he gets us, too," said Raspold. He was considering every aspect swiftly. He could take a jumper back to Earth, talk to Ali'i, get a crew of FECAB, and return. But he couldn't take a legal ship, for Nge's men would be watching the spaceport. Moreover, the police, if working with Nge, could arrest him and turn him over to Nge. If he hired an illegal jumper, he might fall into Nge's hands just as easily as if he tried the legal route. Nge might have the word around among the underworld that he wanted Raspold. Even if he got to Earth, Nge would be gone by the time he returned. He might already have left Diveboard on the expedition against Voittamaton.

"Any place in town that rents cars or gravs?" he said to Quinn.

"Yeah. Jock Barry. But he's as crooked as a pretzel. He could be a stoolie for Nge."

"We won't rent one from him. We'll steal it," said Raspold.

They walked to Barry's place, a single-story foam structure on the edge of town. It was three in the morning; the building was dark. Raspold shot the lock off the front door. He and Quinn entered and picked out a Bluebolt four-seater gravity-drive. Unfortunately, there were no keys available. He stuck the muzzle of the pistol against Barry's ribs as Barry came charging out of his rooms in the rear. Barry did not argue; he handed over the gun in his hand and the keys. Raspold, wanting to make sure that Barry would not contact Nge—if he had intended to do so—took him along in the Bluebolt.

Big Chuck took over the controls and lifted the runabout just above treetop level. He steered it northwards, toward Fulka's house on the island 80 kilometers, landed the Bluebolt in an open space. Raspold, after making sure that Barry had no wrister or other means of wireless communication on his person, told Barry to start walking back home.

TEN minutes later, the big Tserokian slowed the Bluebolt. The lake was in sight. It sparkled in the light of Diveboard's full moon. The house on the island in the middle of the lake gleamed whitely. No lights came from its windows.

Big Chuck, following Raspold's orders, slid the Bluebolt down the bank, into the lake, and under the surface. The car spurted for-

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ward in the darkness of the waters until it struck the shallow mud of the island. The Tserokian lifted it slowly above the surface. They were on the beach, just outside the thick forest surrounding the house. There were no roads to the house. Raspold debated with himself whether they should proceed on foot, then decided against it. Big Chuck lifted the Bluebolt to a position level with the tops of the trees. The car, bending the treetops before it, moved toward the house. When they came to the clearing around the house, they stopped.

"I don't see how they could be expecting us," said Raspold. "But, with Nge, you never know. If it's a trap, we go into it."

A thick stone-and-cement wall about ten meters high surrounded the house, which was about sixty meters from the wall. The house was a two-story structure also built of native rocks and cement. It looked as if it had from ten to twelve rooms. Against the northern wall stood a stone garage.

Raspold had Big Chuck guide the Bluebolt completely around the house. He was well aware that anyone looking out of the dark windows could see the glint of moonlight on the silvery Bluebolt. At any moment, he thought, guns will start firing. And we'll know where we stand.

"There are windows but no doors," he said. "They must get to the rooftop via grav and go down through a trapdoor. So will we."

"Nge isn't the man to sleep without guards of some kind," said Big Chuck. "That is, if he is in there. We don't even know that. Something's in there."

"Wait a minute," said Raspold. "You have to think about one thing. Nge's the greatest booby-trapper in the world. If he's left that house for keeps, he'll likely trigger it. If he knew I was coming to it, he wouldn't, for he's sworn to take me alive. But maybe he doesn't know I've tracked him this far."

HE told big Chuck to take the Bluebolt back across the forest-top to the beach. Here the car descended, and they slid a few feet above the beach around the island until Raspold saw what he was looking for. A log washed up by the waves, a log about one decimeter in diameter and two meters long. The three got out of the car, picked up the log, and laid it at right angles to the front and back seats. Quinn and Raspold held the log steady while Woodwolf piloted the car to a height of 20 meters.

The car moved until it was over the house, still silent and white in the moonlight. Woodwolf locked the controls and rose from the pilot's seat to help them.

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With his strength added to theirs, one end of the log rose easily and was held vertically by the side of the car.

Raspold said, "Let her loose," and the log dropped. They sat down quickly, strapped themselves with the safety belts, and Big Chuck rolled the car fifty degrees along its longitudinal axis so that they could get a good view over the side.

The log, black in the silver moonlight, was almost on its target by the time they were ready to look. When it struck, it was horizontal, and the roof received the impact of the full length.

A bright flash appeared. Big Chuck slammed the Bluebolt into sudden flight, and the occupants were pressed back against the seat. For a moment, they were deafened.

Raspold looked back and saw planks and stones and other objects flying up higher than the car. If they had stayed, they would have been hit.

"I think," said Raspold, when he felt the others could hear him, "the mere opening of the rooftop door would have set off that mine. Anyway, we know one thing. Nge, if he was there, has left. Probably for Voittamaton. If he really dares."

THEY shot back to the city. Raspold went to the Terrestrial Consul and identified himself. After telling part of his story to the Consul, he had no trouble getting passports for himself and Woodwolf. Quinn decided to stay on Diveboard and continue in business. The passports gave the two immunity from police seizure (such a right has been granted in the contract with Earth ten years previously). He and the big Tserokian took a nonsked to Earth. An hour after getting through Customs, Raspold stood in the office of Ali'i.

"If your surmises are correct," said Ali'i, puffing away on a big cigar, "and if what I've read of Voittamaton is true, we can forget about Nge. He's as good as dead."

"We can't know for sure," said Raspold. "I want permission for myself, Woodwolf, and a pilot to go to Voittamaton. A small ship might be undetected by Nge. But if a big force showed up, we'd just scare him. He'd go into translation, and we'd have to start the chase all over again."

"Woodwolf?"

"Swear him in as a temporary agent with limited powers and under my supervision," said Raspold. "If you don't, the damn fool will go to Voittamaton by himself. And he might get in the way, cause God-knows-what kind of mess. He's a good man, and he knows Nge's history, his behavior patterns."

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"You'll have to take full responsibility for him and his actions," said Ali'i. He pressed a button and spoke into the box on his desk.

"Miss Petersen, show Mr. Woodwolf in."

Raspold and Big Chuck spent two hours with Ali'i, and then they went off to sleep for two hours while Ali'i made arrangements. Waking up completely refreshed, they removed the Morpheus electrodes from their temples and went to eat breakfast. Afterwards, Ali'i introduced them to their pilot.

Raspold recognized him at once.

"Glad to see you're on the team," he said. "We couldn't have a better man."

He introduced Big Chuck to Aga-Oglu, a tall broad-shouldered man with a narrow face, a big curved nose, and deeply sunken eyes. Later, when Raspold was alone with the Tserokian, he said, "He's a native of Kagan. Was a member of the Baudelairean Gang. I was the one who arrested him. About three years ago. He was rehabilitated and discharged from John Hopkins a year ago. Now, like a lot of rehabs, his experience with the criminal world is being used to good advantage by FECAB."

"You aren't a rehab?" said Big Chuck.

"If I'd been a criminal," said Raspold, "I'd never have been caught." He smiled to soften the egotism of the statement, but Big Chuck was not sure that Raspold was at all facetious.

Aga-Oglu called them, and they boarded the ship. Their take-off time was 13:47.22; to be delayed a second meant that new data would have to be fed into the ship's computer and a new translation period arranged for.

AN hour later, subjective time, they were in a wide orbit about thirty thousand myriameters from Voittamaton. The nearest star was the sun of Diveboard, some ten lightyears away. The rim of the Galaxy was so far away that it looked like a rough luminous humpbacked disc seen edge on. And there was so little light that the planet, relatively close, was invisible.

"There it is," said Aga-Oglu, indicating the ghostly white circle on the screen before him. The image faded out and strengthened in 45-degree sectors, and on each side of the circle were little bursts of whiteness.

"Those little flashes are too big to be vessels," said Aga-Oglu. "Orbital debris; asteroidlets, maybe."

He flicked off the active scanner and turned on the passive.

"Now what?"

"We land," said Raspold.

Aga-Oglu shrugged and said,

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"I'll set the computer to land us in thirty minutes. We ought to be in our suits, have everything else ready by then O.K.?"

Raspold nodded, and the three began to prepare for the landing. Twenty minutes later they were in their space suits and strapped to their seats. Aga-Oglu had turned the scanner on for another two minutes, long enough for the computer to receive all necessary data. Then, three minutes before the translator was to go into action, he turned the scanner on again. The computer rechecked their position and verified the setting of the translator "gauge".

"We make it in one big jump," said the pilot. "A series of small translations might allow Nge or whatever is on that planet to detect us between jumps. I've set the translator for minimum tolerance. We won't materialize any closer than one kilometer. We could try within that distance, but we'd run the risk of materializing under the surface."

Raspold's hands were tightly clenched around the arms of his seat, and they remained tight when Aga-Oglu went into action. He switched the controls to manual and rammed two control sticks forward. The vessel accelerated, and the occupants felt themselves pressed back against their seats. The window in front of them suddenly cleared; they were automatically on visual now. They clamped their jaws to keep from crying out. The surface was rushing toward them; they were going to crash!

But Aga-Oglu knew what he was doing. He had shot the craft downward as swiftly as he dared after coming out of translation so that he could get on the surface before their power was mysteriously cut off. Twenty seconds later they had landed.

THE entire upper half of their ship was transparent, and they could see the surface of the planet. Rather, could see what the darkness permitted.

It was more than they had expected. Something gleamed outside. Somethings. Tall and white, apparently casting a self-generated and feeble glow. Everywhere around them. So close they pressed against the vessel. Aga-Oglu had, with magnificent skill, landed them—wedged them—in an aisle of the phantom objects.

Raspold examined the closest one. It was a slender round pillar which rose to a height of five meters. At its top was a globe approximately two meters in diameter. This was only partially white; it bore irregular blackish blotches. The globe on the stele next to it also had the patches, but these were of a different pattern. And, on each stele, running from top to bottom, were characters. Alphabetical letters?

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Raspold turned away from them. "How close are we to The Mouth?" he said, describing the opening in the mountain.

Aga-Oglu, looking at a card in his hand, said, "We were supposed to make a final translation within at least ten kilometers of The Mouth. The scanner took a fix while we were landing. We're just nine kilometers away. Straight North. How's that, huh?"

"Did it pick up any of Nge's ships?"

"No. How could it? If his fleet landed in this forest . . ."

Aga-Oglu read two other cards, and he said, "No more atmosphere than the Moon. Funny, too, when you're on a planet only a little smaller than Earth. Should at least be a frozen atmosphere, gas-snow."

Raspold considered. They could lift the ship above the globed steles and make a dash for The Mouth in it. Or two could get into each of the one-man "hoppers" stored in the rear of the bigger ship and advance between the aisles of the steles and beneath the cover of the globes. That meant that the Kagan would have to remain in the ship.

Aga-Oglu protested.

"If we have to come running," said Raspold, "I want everything triggered to go the moment we drive into the hopper-port. And if we don't return within two hours, you are to leave without us, at once, and report to Ali'i. That's an order."

He made sure his watch synchronized with Woodwolf's and Aga-Oglu's, shook hands with the Kagan, and walked to the hoppers. These were small rugged craft much used by spacers in asteroid mining. The two in the port had been especially beefed up for service on a large planet; they were capable of speeds up to six hundred kilometers an hour and could cruise at one hundrd kilometers an hour for six hours before needing refueling. Each was armed with two .45 machine guns located in the forward end of the thick runners (like a sled's) placed at the underpart of the craft.

RASPOLD rotated the hopper so that it faced the north and lifted it over the *Pulex* and down into the aisle in front of it. Woodwolf's craft followed him.

Raspold began to increase his speed swiftly. But, after several seconds, while the tall white pillars and their globes shot by him, he lifted his hand in signal to Woodwolf. And he slowed the craft, looking in the rearview mirror to make sure that the big Tserokian wasn't going to hit him. When he had come to a halt, he lifted the hopper level with the globes. He examined the nearest ones. Shaking his head, he pro-

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ceeded slowly enough to allow himself a good look at those passing on his right. He crawled past them for a minute. Then, as if making up his mind, he lifted his hand again, and shot the hopper forward, reaching one hundred km p/h in five seconds. Again, the white and silent aisle sped by in a blur; the huge hole at the base of the mountain—outlined on the scanner—expanded before him. He stopped the hopper two kilometers from it, and Woodwolf landed directly behind him. Raspold flipped the switch that would put them in tight-beam communication. "I slowed down because there was something familiar about the patterns of the dark patches on the globes. Did they not look to you as if they represented continents? As if the globes were supposed to be planets, and the white portions are seas?"

"I didn't think so," said Big Chuck. "But, now that you point it out . . ."

"You don't suppose they do represent planets?" said Raspold. "Markers? Markers for what? Possessions?"

"This place gives me the spooks," said the Tserokian. "It looks like one big graveyard. The biggest in the world."

The hairs on the back of Raspold's neck rose. He said, "Maybe it is."

"What do you mean?"

Raspold shrugged and said, "I really don't know. But the whole thing is curious. A thousand square miles of nothing but globes on steles. For what purpose?"

"Maybe somebody in there has the answer?"

"If he—it—does," said Raspold, "I hope he feels like talking."

He reached for the controls, then stopped. Above and ahead of him, above the mountain, a luminous round object had appeared. It was, at first, a pale globe, dinnerplate sized. Which meant that, at this distance from him, it must be at least fifty meters in diameter. It could have been hanging, undetected, all this time; now, it had started to pour out light. And, in a few seconds, the light had strengthened, had become as bright as the Earthly sun.

"What the hell's going on?" said Woodwolf.

"Something just came out of the cave mouth," said Raspold. "It flew up the mountainside, went over the top."

HE sat for several seconds, rigid in his seat, before speaking. "Maybe it's a decoy. But let's go after it, anyway."

He shut off the beam and shot the hopper at an angle which would take it just above the sharp point of the mountain. Woodwolf

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followed him. Raspold, clearing the peak, saw that the mountain was part of a range of similar jagged cones. And he risked a quick look behind him and saw that the monuments were white as bleached bones under a desert sun. And that nowhere in the illuminated area was a sign of Nge's fleet. Perhaps, he thought, Nge had taken his ships into the cavern mouth. Or, he had never reached the surface.

His mother ship, the *Pulex*, was still sitting wedged in the aisle. He could imagine Aga-Oglu's frantic reaction to the light, and he hoped the man would stay where he was, as ordered.

The hopper almost struck the top peak, then it was by. And Raspold saw the thing that had flown from the cave. It was not more than thirty meters from him and was hanging in space, facing him, as if waiting for him.

It was the strangest creature that Raspold had ever seen, and he had seen many. It had a long reddish-brown body roughly centaur-shaped. The lower torso gave a bilobed impression; there was a deep groove running its length where a spine would be in any other creature and where one might be in this. Six spindly and grotesquely long limbs hung downward from the lower torso and ended in something like a human foot. The upper torso had narrow shoulders and a neck and a head and two arms as spindly and overly long as the "legs". These ended in enormous hands with fingers that made Raspold think of spider legs.

The face was that of a demon's. Humanoid, it had a chin, acromegalically developed. A nose that looked like a parrot's beak. Great forward-leaning ears. Two long independently moving fleshy strips sprouting from each cheek. The forehead was very low; the skull was hairless. The eyes were set in fleshy slants.

It was the tail that startled Raspold the most. A thick pillar, almost as long as the body, it ended in a thick oval four-lobed pad.

The creature was a nightmare, something out of an opium smoker's dreams. It had no right to exist, to be unprotected by a spacesuit, to have limbs where limbs were not needed to move, to have a nose where no air was, to have ears where sound had no medium through which to travel, to have a mouth where it could not talk.

It moved, seemingly by a biologically generated control of gravity. It lived without artificial devices where nothing could live naturally.

Raspold decided to break the silence between the hoppers; he activated the radio. With all the

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maneuvering they might have to do, they could not afford to jockey around until lined up for tight-beam transmission.

"Watch that tail!" he said to Woodwolf. "It looks dangerous"

"Here come four more," said Woodwolf's voice.

Raspold spun the hopper around so he could see past the Tserokian's craft. Four similar creatures were just coming over the peak.

A SHADOW appeared above him; he looked upward and at the same time placed the hopper into a reverse motion so savage that the upper part of his body strained against the belts holding him. The thing—which he mentally termed the "space scorpion," darted after him, its long arms held out toward him.

He stopped the hopper and threw it forward, intending to ram the creature. But the scorpion shot off at an angle.

Woodwolf's hopper darted towards Raspold's. It tilted upward, and flame appeared at the open end of one of the runners beneath the hopper.

The scorpion, struck by a series of .45 slugs, turned end over end, its legs and arms flailing. Then, as if it had suddenly lost its power over gravity, it began to fall straight down.

Raspold steered his hopper at the four scorpions. These scattered, increasing the gap between them, some going up and some down. He had lost his chance to get all of them with one sweep of the machine-guns. But he did center one and gave it a burst. It was hurled backward, cartwheeling, and then began to fall swiftly.

There was a thud, and he looked upward to see a face upside down, pressed against the port on his left. The scorpion was clinging to the top of the hopper and was peering down at him.

For several seconds, he looked into the eyes above the falcon's beak. They were black, innocent of white of pupil or any other color. A ball of jet.

Then, he turned his hopper over and over in a violent maneuver to throw the creatures away, but the thing clung tightly, and the four-lobed pad on the end of its tail came down against the right port and pressed against it.

Immediately, the irradiated plastic began to melt.

Raspold snatched the .45 automatic from its holster by the edge of his seat. He fired twice into the window, the muzzle centered on the pad. Normally, the bullets would have come flying back from the plastic. But, weakened by the melting, the plastic was no obstacle. The bullets plunged into the fleshy looking pad, and the pad jerked away.

Woodwolf's hopper suddenly appeared, the ends of its runners on a level with the top of Ras-

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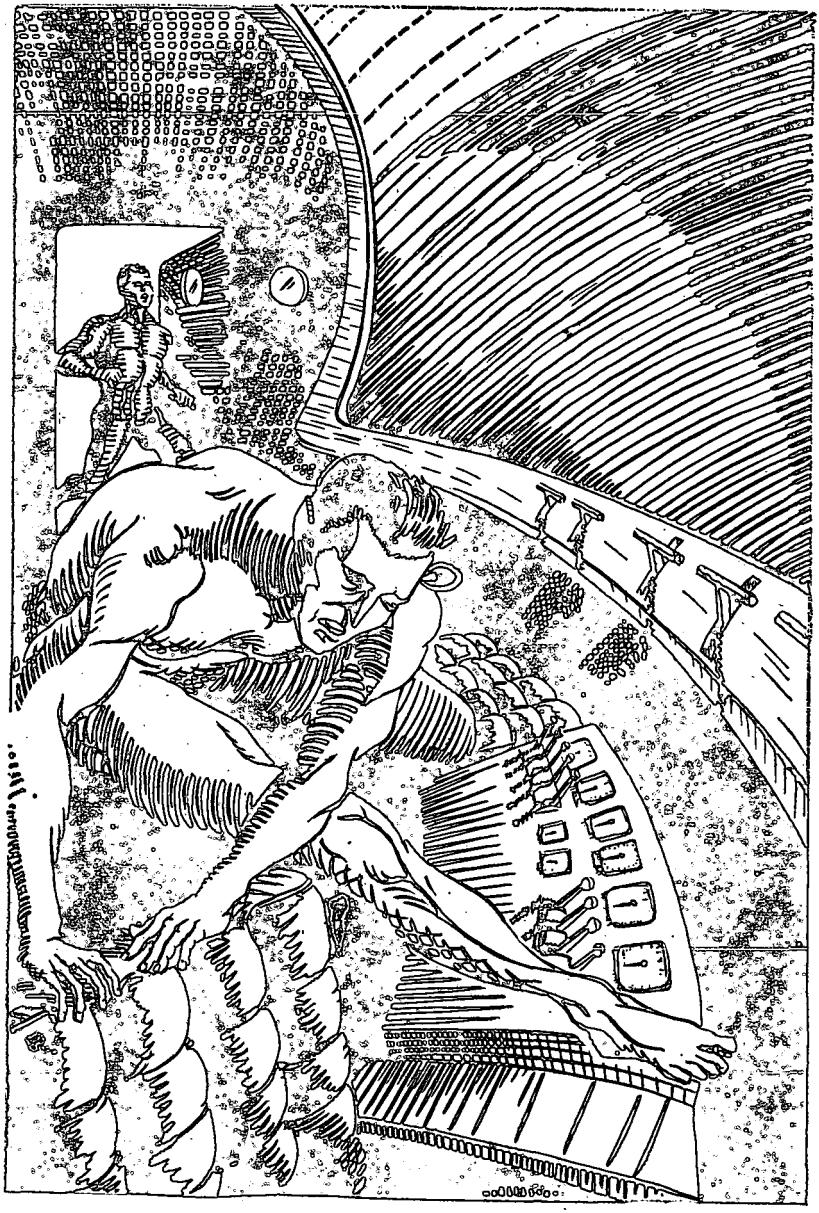

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pold's craft. Flame shot out from the open end; the scorpion's face disappeared. And reappeared on the other side of Raspold's hopper as it fell away.

That left two. No, one. For another had attacked Woodwolf, and to do so it had to pass by Raspold. He fired, knocked it spinning away, followed, dived after it, gave it four more bursts, and saw it fall toward the peak.

NOW, the two men maneuvered their hoppers to herd the scorpion and catch it in a crossfire. But the creature turned and fled. Its speed must have been at least three hundred kilometers an hour; it went over the peak and disappeared, presumably toward the cavern mouth.

Raspold checked the hole in the plastic port. It was about the size of his hand, but he didn't worry about it. The cabin had no air in it; the access ports had been closed for protection against micrometeorites.

"If we go into the cavern," said Raspold, "we may encounter thousands of these. You know how little chance we'd have then."

"Yeah," said Big Chuck. "Maybe most of them were too busy with Nge to bother us. And what about Aga-Oglu? We'd better check on him before we do anything else."

Raspold looked out of the corner of his eyes at the bright-as-the-sun globe above him. He was sure that the scorpions were not responsible for that. Whoever had released them against the two Terrans had placed that globe there.

"We'll check on Aga-Oglu," he said. "Keep silence unless it's necessary to break it."

They dipped at an angle to the peak and stopped just above it. The rows on rows of globes and pillars were as before, ghostly, chill, white. The *Pulex* lay where it had been. The Kagan, Raspold knew, would see them when they came down along the face of the mountain. He'd know they were all right.

They dropped down the almost vertical face of the peak. But, before they reached the great opening below them, they were in darkness again. The globe had been extinguished.

Raspold felt cold. They were being watched. How? By whom? He did not know. But he assumed that he would soon find out. Probably not to his pleasure.

Just below the top of the cavern, he stopped. Why go on? Why not be sane, be discreet? Return to Earth, tell them what had happened. It was more than likely that Nge had met defeat at the hands of whatever lived in the bowels of Voittamaton. If the Federation wanted to, it could send a fleet back, a fleet which

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could land as they had and could shoot missiles with thermonuclear warheads into the cave. Get rid of the menace once and for all. Or, if Voittamaton were truly invincible, then Nge could be marked off the books and the planet would be left alone forever.

He sighed. The old proverb was true. Curiosity killed the cat, and Raspold had a cat's curiosity. He could not endure not knowing what had happened to Nge, what was the power within this dark planet.

He broke the silence and said to Woodwolf, "I'm going on in, but you don't have to be stupid too. Go back to the *Pulex*."

"I hope you're not ordering me to return," said the Tserokian. "I don't want to be guilty of insubordination. But if I have to, I will. I swore I'd find my sister or find out what happened to her. And I swore I'd get Nge."

"It's your neck," said Raspold.

HE directed the craft into the cave, just beneath the arch of rock. And he stopped almost at once. He had expected to be surprised but not so soon.

Below him, at least five hundred meters below, was the floor of the cave. He could see it easily because it glowed with a light. A strange light that illuminated only the area of the floor and cast no glow above a definite demarcation. The ships of Nge's fleet were clearly illuminated by the light. They rested on the floor in ranks of six, the stolen destroyer *George A. Custer* and the largest ships in the front rank and the others, graded according to size, behind them. All had various ports open, the ports out of which the pirates must have proceeded on foot or in hoppers. The front ranks were by the wall at the far end of the cave, the wall that had stopped further progress on their part. And the personnel of the vessels must have gone through an opening of the wall, an opening large enough for ten men abreast but too small for the ships.

Raspold wondered where the light came from. Then, as he dropped down two hundred meters for a closer look, he saw that the surface of the lighted area had a shiny appearance. It was almost as if the entire floor of the cave had been covered with a thick plastic which trapped light issuing from some unseen source.

He gasped and dropped down again and then paled.

The floor *was* solid with some clear material. The ships were caught in it, embedded like insects in amber!

Raspold almost turned back at this point. If the power within Voittamaton could spring a trap like this, could release some gluey or flowing plastic sub-

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stance and imprison big ships like this, then light it up for display purposes, what chance did two men have? Who knew but what the light was for his benefit?

The ports were open. Therefore, the men who had left the fleet must have gone on through that archway in the far wall. But the men that must have been left behind in the ships were trapped. Doomed to die of starvation.

He thought, why didn't they just translate? The plastic could not hold them if they used the drive.

The answer was obvious. They did not have the power. It must have been cut off by an outside agency, just as the power in that Federation expedition had been cut off. So, the men would not die of starvation. They would die choking as soon as they used up the air in the ships and then that in their spacesuits.

He had a thought, one which did not please him. If the plastic material also filled up the entrance to the next chamber or cave, he would be forced to turn back.

He guided the hopper over the embedded ships and to the archway. And found that the luminous material stopped several meters short of it. There was more then enough room for the hoppers to pass through.

THE entranceway did not lead immediately to another cave, as he had expected. It was the opening for a tunnel, cut out of solid rock, that curved not quite imperceptibly to the left and led gently downward. Raspold had turned on the searchbeam so that he could see where he was going; the light splashed off an oily blackness of hard-seeming stone. Then, a bright glow was ahead, the tunnel ceased, and they were in another cavern.

This was so huge that it looked like the interior of a pocket world. It was well-lighted from an invisible source—nothing new in Raspold's technology—and the floor, polished granitoid stone, held thousands of objects. These were arranged in rows; the aisles between were broad enough for five hoppers abreast. The objects were in groups and stood on black metal platforms about two meters high. It became evident, as they advanced down the aisle, that they were in a museum. The objects consisted of paintings, stone and wooden sculptures, wood and stone and metal weapons, furniture, models of dwellings: tents, houses, temples, castles, and boats, wagons, chariots. And, standing stiffly and silently beside the artifacts, the makers of the artifacts.

These looked at first like wax dummies. Raspold lifted his hopper and went closer. And he was

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sure that the statues were stuffed specimens, superb examples of taxidermy. They were members of some centauroid species with which he was unfamiliar.

After a while, they came to an aisle that crossed the one they were on at right angles, and Raspold decided to turn onto that. He drove for several kilometers until he met another aisle which continued in the same direction as the aisle he had originally been on. Turning down this, he at once saw that another type of sentients was represented on the platforms. These were bipedal, humanoid, their legs from the knees downward incased in tubes of clear plasticlike material. As he passed the platforms, he saw that the groups were arranged to show the stages of physical and cultural evolution of the various subspecies among the bipeds. Near the end of the aisle, they were passing platforms with highly developed artifacts, artistically and technologically.

They crossed an aisle at right angles to this one, and started down it. And found that this represented the same progress in evolution for a centauroid race of quite a different type than the first they had seen.

Raspold lifted the hopper until he could see far across the gigantic chamber. There, barely within the limits of his vision, was what he had expected. He gestured to Big Chuck and shot over the heads of the thousands of silent figures until he was at the desired aisle.

He did not need to break silence to tell Woodwolf what these represented. The subhuman figures were familiar enough to both of them, from their schoolbooks. After a minute, they were going by inescapably recognizable sentients. Homo Sapiens.

RASPOLD sped down the aisle while the prehistory and history of man flashed by. Ten kilometers, and he was at the end. Beyond, a sea of empty platforms.

He did not turn then and go down the aisle that ran at ninety degrees to this. He knew that if he did he would see the present development of all the extra-Terrestrial sentients he knew and many many more he did not know. How far that aisle extended was a matter of conjecture. It went so far it passed the horizon, out of sight. But he was willing to bet with any taker that every sentient group that presently inhabited this Galaxy was represented. Presently? Probably many that had existed but did no longer. When he had risen high to take a look, he had seen quite a few rows that had ended long before the others, that had empty platforms at the end of their lines.

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Did the vast prairie of empties before him wait for further steps in evolution of the human race? Or did the curator of this museum consider that Homo Sapiens was through, and the empties were to be filled with new sentients?

Raspold shivered, and lifted the hopper high. He rose to the top of the chamber, over two kilometers high, and looked for doorways. He found one, an entrance that looked small from where he was. But, when he came close to it, it was huge. An archway a hundred meters high and two hundred broad. And it was a thousand meters thick.

On emerging from the entrance, they found themselves in another cavern as Brobdingnagian as the last. And their eyes widened and their lips parted with gasps of wonder as they gazed upon mountain after mountain of piled-up jewels. Diamonds, emeralds, rubies, topazes, every precious stone that they knew of and many more they did not. The twinkling glittering masses, heaped higher than three-story buildings, were composed of cut jewels of every size, from thumbnail dimensions to diamonds taller than a man.

Raspold wondered why Nge had not stopped here, taken all he could carry, and returned to his fleet. Perhaps, he had, and found his fleet trapped forever and had come back to find the possessor of these treasures and either kill him in revenge or force him to unspring the trap.

More likely, though, he had not retraced his steps. Nge might be tempted to grab and run but he would resist it. More than a share of this, he would want the knowledge and the power of the owners of this world. If he had those, he could easily be the most powerful man—being—in the Galaxy. And he could take whatever he wanted.

Or so Nge would reason, thought Raspold. I think like a criminal, and that is how I would think.

If even a portion of these were dumped on the market, they would be very cheap. Maybe not. There were a thousand worlds in the Galaxy that he knew of and a probable ninety-nine thousand more to be found. These could be spread out very thin.

HE repressed the impulse to take several of the larger jewels with him and sped as swiftly as discretion allowed toward the opposite wall of the cavern. Here he found another archway just like the last one, but he paused before it. Big Chuck manuevered directly behind him, and they established tight-beam transmission.

"It's still not too late," said Raspold. "We'd not be criticized

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at all if we return to Earth. We've invaluable information. The discovery of a form of life that can live in airless space, biologically control gravity and generate a plastic-melting heat is enough to justify us. Especially, if we pick up several of the bodies of the scorpions we shot down and give them to the scientists for dissection. And we can take some of the jewels. They're not stolen from Federation people, not as far as we know. We'd be entitled to keep them. You could buy the biggest ranch on Tserokia; I could resign from the FECAB, set up my own agency.

"But there are stronger factors. I believe that we're as helpless before the inhabitants of Voittamaton as new-born kittens before a hungry wolf. From what I've seen, we don't have a chance."

"I'm going on ahead," said the Tserokian.

Raspold sighed and drove the hopper down the archway. This was even longer than the previous ones. And, as they neared its opposite end, they saw that it was obscured, flickering, like a flawed sheet of plastic on which light was playing.

But Raspold's hopper went through it as if it did not exist. They were inside another cavern. The hopper lost the two decimeters of height above the floor. Raspold was startled, but he saw at once that every light on his instrument panel had gone out and all dials indicated zero. His power was cut off.

Shadows fell on his hopper, and resolved into dozens of the scorpions. They grabbed his hopper and rose with it to a height of fifty meters before he could decide what action to take. By then, he knew that he could do nothing except go along for the ride. If he shot the scorpions, he'd be dropped and killed.

Besides, he knew that the inhabitants of Voittamaton had finally taken action against him, that they had been waiting for him, and had sprung the trap. At least the tension of waiting for attack was gone. Behind him, Woodwolf's hopper was also being carried.

RASPOLD looked through the spaces between the cloud of brown bodies around his craft. This chamber was even more fantastic. Its walls were plated with gold, and the gold was set with patterns of jewels. There were niches in which were set statues and paintings. The artwork, however, differed from that he had seen in the first chamber. This, it was evident, was all of a piece. The work of one group of sentients. The paintings were bizarre, many almost incomprehensible. And the statuary repre-

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sented beings he had never seen before. Creatures that could only be termed dracocentaurs. Except that they had six lower limbs. The upper torso was scaled, and the arms were long but humanoid. The face looked like an intelligent dragon's.

Abruptly, the hopper fell as those carrying it let themselves drop. For a few seconds, he wondered if he were to be killed as an eagle kills a tortoise, by dropping it and breaking its shell. But the scorpions applied deceleration, and he was gently lowered onto the floor. Immediately, the plastic ports shattered, fell outward, and huge hands with spidery fingers reached in and took his automatic from him. He was dragged out of the craft and set on his feet.

The visor to his helmet was opened, and it was then he knew that the chamber had atmospere. When he was whirled around, he saw that Nge and his men had also been caught. They were standing in orderly rows, unarmed and as naked as the day they were born. Two hundred or so men and women in twenty rows of ten each.

Behind him, Woodolf cried out, "Tuli! Tuli!" and he spoke a long string of phrases in his native tongue.

So, Woodwolf's sister was one of the women. That part of his quest was ended, anyway.

And he recognized Heinrich Nge. The man was standing in the first row, half a pace ahead of the others. The giant's massively muscled body was beautiful, shining copper in the golden light. The face—high-browed, aquiline-nosed, thick-lipped, was set in scowling lines; he looked like a statue of an ancient Pharaoh carved from a polished close-grained dark-red stone. His hands, like those of everybody in the ranks, were free. But his feet could not move, and, as Raspold was carried closer, he saw why. Every human being had his legs embedded inside a block of some transparent material.

Shocked, he thought of the stuffed beings in the museum. Their legs, also, were set inside similar cubes.

Carried horizontally, looking upward, Raspold saw that the ceiling of the gigantic chamber was covered with scorpions hanging upside down or else drifting slowly near the top. He turned his head to both sides and saw that, behind the human beings and on both sides, the floor was packed with the creatures.

Perhaps the most terrible aspect of the scene was that they uttered not a sound.

HE and Woodwolf were carried before the front row of the prisoners, also silent, and there the suits were swiftly re-

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moved from them. Their underclothes were stripped off, and scorpions carried in two metallic boxes. Inside the boxes was a clear liquid. The feet of each man were thrust into a box despite their struggles, and a scorpion dropped a tiny red pellet into the liquid in each box. Within a few seconds, the liquid had become a jelly. In half a minute, the jelly had become a solid. The men and the boxes were lifted into the air, and the boxes were slid from the material. And the men were set back on their feet. Raspold found that he could stay upright without any difficulty; his feet were far enough apart.

Before, he had been too occupied with what was happening to him to take a good look at the thing—things—about ten meters in front of the human beings. Now, he saw that a ball of some glassy stuff hung in the air at a level with his head. The ball had a diameter of about thirty meters and colors played inside the sphere as if a hundred living rainbows were chasing each other. On top of the ball, sitting or lying in a depression, was a dracocentaur.

It was about twenty meters long, exclusive of the long scaled, and barbed tail which hung down on the other side of the ball but now and then rose into the air and waved about like a cat's tail. The upper torso reared into the air, propped up by the elbows of the long arms. The face was huge and frightening; the eyes were enormous. From each cheek hung a long tendril of pale flesh. The mouth, when opened, revealed quite human teeth, teeth that looked grotesque in that mouth, in that half-human, half-dragon face.

The eyes were completely black. They looked ancient beyond the ken of his mind. Their blackness was that of interstellar space itself. No, that of extra-Galactic space, frightening in the emptiness and foreverness.

Raspold stood humble and quaking and silent, like some suppliant before the greatest of all kings. Behind him, the others were silent, too.

FINALLY, the dracocentaur opened its mouth, and the black and flexible lips spoke. They spoke in Lingo, but with phonetic values strange to Raspold's ears, so that he thought at first that it was an entirely foreign language.

"You came through the Place of Dead Worlds before you entered my home!" it said in a loud roaring voice. "Did not that make you think? Think that you could do nothing against one who has seen those globes form out of the primeval gas and become balls of flaming gas and then cool off and give birth to brain-

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less life and then to creatures that can talk and then give death as the parent sun cooled or became a nova? Nothing against one who may see this Galaxy die? And see another rise from the ashes?"

Raspold felt as if his bones had crystallized into ice. So that was what the globes on the steles represented? He had passed through the greatest graveyard in the world, the graveyard of planets long dead. But what sort of creature was this that could mark the passing of a world by setting up a monument? And wait eons for another to die and set up another marker? How long, how immeasurably long, since the first stele and globe?

The dracocentaur stopped talking and looked at them for several minutes. Then, it said, "No. You would not stop to think. You would not dare to stop. Your greed blinded you. As it has every creature that has tried to storm this world. Long before your ancestors were even one-celled sea creatures."

Raspold did not think he had the courage. Yet, he spoke. And, afterward, he thought it was the bravest act of his life.

"You are wrong! I did not come here to steal. Neither did my companion. And some among the others did not come of their own free will. They were brought along as prisoners. And my friend and I came only because we hoped to catch these criminals."

The being on the sphere opened its mouth. Its eyes focussed on Raspold. It said, "I know."

There was another silence while the brain that had outlived mountains of granite considered them.

Then, "I cannot worry about your petty problems—how petty you cannot guess—of good and evil. You are all one to me. Would you distinguish between the moral characters of a swarm of gnats?"

"I would," said Raspold boldly. After all, what did he have to lose? Moreover, would a being as powerful, as ancient as this, be irritated by a being like himself?

Perhaps. A lion will swat at a fly.

"One insect considers another," said the dracocentaur.

"I talked to your predecessor, Versinen," said the being. "He went mad. Rather, more mad. Because I showed him what awaited him when he died."

IT paused and seemed to stare through them, the walls of stone, the mountain, and out to the stars. Or beyond the stars.

"What waits for us all," it said. "What terrifies even me."

Now, for the first time since Raspold had entered, Nge spoke.

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He bellowed, "You are lying! After death, there is nothing. Nothing! You are trying to frighten us! You do not know! You do not know!"

The dracocentaur waited until the echoes of Nge's frenzied cries had ceased. Then, it said, "I know."

Again, it fell silent, and the brain within considered thoughts beyond the scope of man. It said, "The one who came before Versinen was a creature whose kind you do not know. They perished some hundreds of thousands of years ago—your Earth years, that is. He came seeking knowledge, not treasure to loot. I showed him what waited for him, for us all. He left crazy. Not as insane as Versinen, because he had greater stability. But he returned to his planet and told what he knew. I think that his revelation had something to do with their swift decline and death."

"What do you intend to do to us?" asked Woodwolf. "I only came here to get my sister and to make Nge pay for what he has done."

"During which, you injured some of my children," said the being. (Raspold thought of him now as Voittamaton; man must name everything).

"Your children? These? said Woodwolf, gesturing at the scorpions.

"Yes. For much longer than you can ever conceive, I was alone here. You see, my people have been practically immortal for a —to you—immeasurably long time. We were scattered over this Galaxy and others. Then, one by one, we died. Some by accident, for we are not truly immortal. Most by suicide. They had lived too long. Only I am left. I would have killed myself, too, but I lived long enough to find out what waits for us after death. And then I dared not.

"But one of the things that made life intolerable was that we quit having children. We quit because we saw that life was, in the end, only futility. Moreover, after eons, we lost the desire to mate, to reproduce. You people have found out how to prolong your lives. And you are just beginning to encounter the numerous problems immortality brings. Wait until you are semi-immortal, like us. Then. . .

"However, recently—a thousand or so of your years ago—I thought, why not have children? They will be some companionship. Not much. Some. So, I removed several millions of egg-cells from suspended animation, and changed their structure somewhat so that they can live and operate in space as well as in atmosphere of any type. They are also the only truly omnivorous sentients in the Galaxy.

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They can eat anything: rocks, trees, plants, animals. They can survive on radiant energy, too, though this is only enough to keep the spark of life from going out. Naturally, they derive the most benefit from eating flesh.

THESE you see now are pre-adolescents. They have been developing for several hundreds of your years. Soon, they will be adolescent and will be reproducing. Then, when this planet becomes too crowded, they will be venturing into the stellar systems in your Galaxy. Look out then!

"But these do not represent the greatest danger to you. There is a storm gathering on the Galaxy nearest to this, beings who are far more dangerous than my young. But you need not worry about them for a hundred years or more.

"However, you may be able to fight these youngsters. They are intelligent but ignorant. Savages. I will teach them nothing. It will be interesting, I hope, to see how they develop, but I doubt it. Interest dies as immortality grows."

"What about us?" shouted Nge. "We are not immortal! We want to live as long as we can! We cannot hurt you, and it will cost you nothing to let us loose!"

"You plead for your lives? Beg?"

"I beg for nothing!" said Nge. "I will not go down on my knees to you and whine for my life! I do not want to die! But, if I have to kiss your scaly tail, I will die first! I do say that we can be no danger to you. So, why not let us go? Especially, if what you say is true about the afterlife? Why condemn us to something you cannot face yourself?"

A horrible rictus opened Voittamaton's mouth. He said, "So! You do not believe what I told you about death. You are only using what I said to argue with me. I will not argue."

He was silent again for a while. Then, "I admire courage and the will to live. Even if I know they mean nothing. Perhaps, that is why I brought my young to life."

He gave a quite human shrug of his shoulders, and . . .

Raspold did not at first grasp what had happened. Seemingly, between the blink of his eyes, he had been transported from the chamber of Voittamaton to the interior of a spaceship. He was in the lounge (he had seen enough of these to know), and stars hung outside the transparent viewport of the lounge. Whether the transition had been instantaneous or he had been made unconscious and transported here, he did not know and would never know.

The important thing was that Nge and his crew and Tuli and

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Chuck Woodwolf and himself were here. They were standing on a great heap of jewels, a layer of diamonds and other precious stones at least a foot thick.

Beyond the lounge was the open doorway to a corridor. And, far down the corridor, another open door. The entrance to the bridge. The pilot's chair was empty; nobody was at the controls.

NGE and his crew still had their feet encased in the transparent blocks. But the blocks were gone from the legs of himself, Woodwolf, and a woman who must be Woodwolf's sister.

Raspold, the shock clearing, saw the situation as arranged by Voittamaton. The ship was accelerating or the gravitic field was on. Otherwise, they'd have been floating in free fall. The way to control of the ship lay open. Raspold shouted, "To the bridge, Woodwolf!" Then he was in the pilot's seat and there, dead ahead, looming so hugely it looked as if it would crush them, was the bulk of a planet. It filled the screen except for one corner cut by an arc.

Raspold was too old a spacehand to be alarmed by its seeming proximity. Instead, he located and found the transceiver controls. And, within a minute, he was in contact. The planet was Diveboard. **THE END**

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The MALATESTA COLLECTION

By ROGER ZELAZNY

Illustrator COYE

Critics and censors, readers and writers are involved today in a sometimes-violent discussion of when frankness and reality in literature become pornography. But what will they say about it in the future?

I'M going to miss the books. Maybe I'm just a senile throwback to the lecherous times, but I like to think it is some bit of scholarly attachment as well.

But I helped to uncover them, so it is only fitting that I be here as they are put away.

Don't be fooled, Cosmic Eye, I am not the voice of one man. All of us contain some of me, as well as Paul Malatesta.

Roden is mounting the platform now. The books are in the box, the box is in the cornerstone, and the statue is draped.

It was one year ago today that he made the discovery, quite by accident. He was digging a hole, that mad sculptor, digging a hole in Time. It was in one of the many unexcavated mounds, where the fragments of old civilizations can sometimes be found. He pokes into them quite a bit—hoping to find a bust, a torso, a fragment of decorated wall. On occasion he comes up with some striking discoveries.

But there was only one Malatesta collection.

* * *

"This occasion deserves some comment," he begins. "Whether

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this is dictated by its notoriety, or by virtue of its value to historians, I cannot say.

"But I can say this," he continues, "what you are doing is wrong. In the light of eternal values, you are being untrue to the species by burying that which is not dead."

There were troubled faces about him on the platform. But he could not be interrupted; no effrontery could stand before the massive dignity of his ninety years. So he went on:

"I take willing part in this ceremony because every grave demands a marker, as surely as the root utters tree. Every passing demands endurable comment, though centuries delayed. We called them forth into the light for a brief moment, and you of the light were shocked, for they were living. Now you would reinter them, and I, their stepfather, have been called upon to commemorate this thing that you do.

"I hate you, all of you. But you must listen to me—you are too polite not to—and doubtless you will applaud when I have finished.

"I remember the day when we found them . . ."

* * *

I REMEMBER it also. His tiny form, in that threadbare cloak he always wears, shot into my office like an arrow. The door banged against the wall, and he, hopping from one leg to another before my desk:

"Come quickly! I have found the soul of our ancestors!"

He darted about like a sparrow, making several false starts toward the door, checking himself each time, when he saw that I did not rise.

"Get on your feet and come with me!" he ordered. "This has waited too long already!"

"Sit down," I told him. "I have an Ancient Literature class in half an hour. It would take something awfully important to call it off."

He snorted his white mustache away from his words:

"Ancient Literature! Still mooning over *Pamela* and *David Copperfield*, eh? Let me tell you something—there is more to it than that, and I've got it!"

Roden had a reputation.

He was an anomaly, almost a pariah, a pet of the wealthy, though he insulted them to their faces, a friend of the artist, whose labors he always encouraged, no matter how puerile—a bohemian in an age where bohemians could not exist—a purveyor of cheap art by commission, a creator of the other kind, which went ignored. The greatest sculptor alive.

Finally, he settled into a seat, nearly immortalizing me to stat-

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ue, with his basilisk's glare.

"I'm not being uncooperative," I apologized. "It's just that I have responsibilities. I can't go running off until I know what I'm chasing."

"Responsibilities," he repeated, in one of his milder tones. "Yes, I guess you do. Almost everyone does these days. There aren't many free spirits any more—grail-chasers who would take an old man's word that something is important enough to be worth an hour or two."

This hurt, because I respect him more than anyone else I know—with his encyclopedic knowledge of art, all his engaging eccentricities, and the cold fire that burns within his works.

"I am sorry," I said. "Tell me what this is all about."

"You are a teacher of literature," he declared. "I've found you an unread library."

I swallowed, blinking, and shelves of books flowed like rivers behind my eyelids.

"Ancient books?" I whispered.

He nodded.

"How old?"

"Many from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and lots of older ones."

I was shaking. How many years had I dreamed of such a find? Mostly, the mounds just held junk; paper is so transient a thing.

"Many?" I asked.

"Many," he acknowledged.

"I'll have to tell the secretary of the department that there won't be a class." I stood. "I'll be right back.—Is it far?"

"An hour's drive."

I flew down the hall, shedding responsibilities like feathers.

* * *

". . . When we examined them we could not believe our good fortune. There were so many—so perfectly preserved against the century's nightfall. The powerful walls of the structure had defended them against moisture, decay, insects . . ."

I held it in quivering hands. Bacon? The legendary Shakespeare, whose name alone survived? Could they have spoken like that? I was appalled. Mark Twain's acerbic brilliance had endured—but this!

I closed *1601* carefully, and placed it in a protective wrapper I had brought. I opened a book by a man named Miller.

Ten minutes later I was sick, very sick. I accepted the bottle of wine Roden produced from under his cloak. He said nothing as I drank.

By candlelight, he was sketching the strange tableau in the corner.

WHAT remained of two human beings rested upon what remained of a bed. I tried

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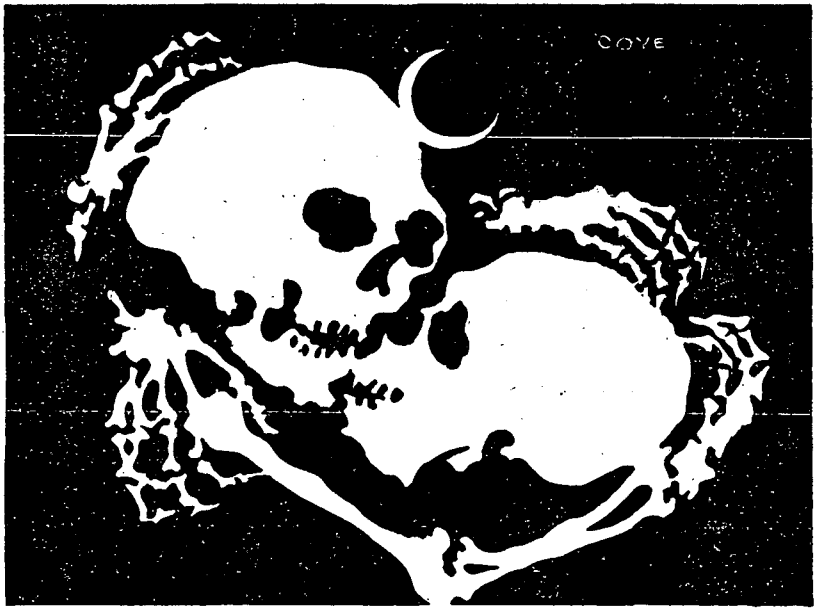

not to look in that direction, but their position was so obvious. My eyes fleshed the skeleton arms. I saw them embracing as the bombs fell; I felt the concrete shake from the burst, striving to stop the radiations that consumed its maker. Now bone embraced bone in a garden of books, grinned at the live voyeur.

I pretended to look at *Moll Flanders*, holding the book to block out the sight.

"This place was called a fallout shelter, wasn't it?"

"That's right. Many people built them before the dark times."

"And this man," I eyed the elaborate *Ex Libra* page to *Kama Sutra*, "this Paul Malatesta prepared his shelter rather unusually, did he not?"

"I don't know." He flipped his sketchpad shut. "I don't know how they thought in those days, but I suppose a man stocked it with what he cherished most."

"I teach Literature," I thought aloud, "but I've never heard of these books—the Harris autobiography, Rochester's *Poems on Several Occasions*, Coryat's *Crudities*, *Gamiani*, *Flossie*, *The Festival of Love* . . ."

"Then it's time you did," he replied, "since they're there."

"But the language," I protest-

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ed, "the subject matter—It's so, so . . ."

"Crude?" he supplied. "Basic? Elemental? Scatalogical? Impolite?"

"Yes."

"I found this place yesterday. I spent the entire night reading. We need these books if we are to have a true picture of our ancestors, and ourselves."

"Ourselves?"

"Yes. You had better read those books over there," he gestured, "the ones by the man named Freud. Do you think man is completely rational, and moral?"

"Of course. We have eliminated crime, education is compulsory.—We have advanced beyond our ancestors, both ethically and intellectually."

"Nonsense!" he snorted again. "The basic nature of man has remained constant throughout history, so far as I can ascertain."

"But these books. . . !"

"They travelled to the moon in those days, they conquered diseases we still suffer. They recognized the demonic spirit of Dionysius which lives in us all. The books that survived were the books most numerous—the small caches have always supplied us with the most important ones—unless you deem currency the mark of greatness."

"I don't know how they will be accepted . . ."

"'If'," corrected Roden quietly.

". . . If you have chosen the path of democratizing art out of existence, I am powerless to stop you. I can only protest. I can condone you, slightly, that you decided against burning them. But your decision to make them wait for a generation better qualified—that is tantamount to eternal condemnation. And you know it, and I condemn you, in turn, for this action . . ."

WHAT a flurry, what a battle of critics, popular and scholarly, I aroused!

When I brought the Malatesta collection to the University a cheer arose from the professorial ranks, shortly to be replaced by raised eyebrows. I am not as old as Roden, but, in a society as proper as our own, I, also, am too old to insult.—But some came close.

At first, all was uncertainty and ambiguity.

—True, it is an important find. Surely, they shed new light on the history of literature. Of course, we will give them our most unbiased attention. But the general public . . . Well, we had better wait until we have assessed them completely.

I had never heard of such a thing, and I told them so.

The table was surrounded by statues of ice. They chose to ig-

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nore what I had said, focussing once more, through thick glasses, the eyes of judgment.

"But Chaucer," I pressed on, "Huysmans, the *Oresteia!* You can't just throw them out because it hurts you to read them! They are literature, distillations of life by genius. . . !"

"We are not convinced," said an icicle, "that they are art."

I exploded and quit my job, but nothing was ever done about my resignation, so I am still here. Literature is like pie, one piece is better than none at all.

"You did not release them. Instead, you have imprisoned them in the cornerstone of your new Philosophy Building—which, in itself, demonstrates one of life's implicit ironies—and you commissioned me, before a year had passed, to construct their cenotaph."

"You did not call it that, but, to balm your consciences—moral people that you are—you could not help but commemorate a greatness you had witnessed, though you despised it.

"I have constructed your memorial—not one of my garish tabernacles of money, where gilt angels sport among seashells, but a memorial to man, as he was, is, and always shall be . . ."

Oh dead Malatesta! with your pale mistress Frances, sporting in a radioactive oven while the missiles hymned their canticle of death—Did she weep? What did she say at the end? I read your diary up until the final entry of that last day—"We are frying. Hell! They will find us the way we began—"

I admire you, Malatesta, as I admire Castiglione and Da Vinci —connoisseur, scholar, and man to the end! Spin on your way, atoms of a man, you have made the sunset of my life more colorful . . .

"It is," he reached for the dark veil, "an enactment of the human condition."

He drew it off.

Gasps filled the courtyard as tears filled my eyes. Roden had done it! In whatever back room or garret they might hide it, his fame would await the eventual call of posterity.

Steel ribs enamelled white—that terrible position!—skeleton arms locked in libidinous embrace forever, and the lascivious *consolamentum* of fleshless faces.

The bronze base bore the simple inscription, "The Kiss, by Roden".

And then, I heard his voice in the distance:

"There it is. Do what you want with it—but never let me near it again!"

Mindlessly, the applause broke forth, amidst the sighs and soft comments.

That day I quit again, for real.

THE END

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a FATE worse than . . .

By ROBERT H. ROHRER

Illustrator SUMMERS

In a world ruled routinely by Satan, to whom do you go in order to sell your soul?

PRIESTLEY put the worst thing he could think of into the offering plate: an old shoe. True, it wasn't half as bad as Mrs. Schultz's can of worms or Mr. Thomas' phornographic photographs, but then Priestley didn't feel very imaginative today, and the Unreverend Mr. Blakely's sermon wasn't as peppy as it usually was, either. In fact, the sermon was rather dull; it ran over the same old ground on the dangers of peace and light: "Are your children going around with beatific smiles on their faces? Show them the Way, before it is too late; before their souls have been lost irrideemably in the grasp of Goodness and Mercy, and they are Blessed for eternity!" A sermon as stereotyped as that didn't deserve anything worse than an old shoe.

Priestly leaned against the back of the pew and decided that this was the last time he would come to Black Mass for a long time. After all, he'd been a good Satanist for all his life; he deserved a rest. And . . .

Don't kid yourself, Priestley, he scowled. It's because of what you're going to do today that you don't want to come to Mass again; don't try to deny it.

The Unreverend Mr. Blakely drew his sermon to a close. The choir boomed out with a deep-toned hymn concerning the carnal joys of murder, after which the malediction was pronounced and the congregation dismissed.

Priestley walked slowly down the church steps onto the sidewalk, his head bowed, his face knotted in a frown. Was what he was about to do right?

No. There was no doubt that what he was about to do was definitely *not* right; and, moreover, it was dangerous. But a man had to have money if he were to live, and Priestley had no money

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whatsoever; in a world such as his own, only the strong had money, and he wasn't of the strong.

He reached the street corner. An old lady carrying a load of packages in her arms was standing there; Priestley grinned, sneaked up behind her, and gave her a shove with his foot. When the old lady turned around and began to throw expletives at him, he picked her up and stuffed her into a plastic DCS can, head down.

Mean. He must be mean today. Meaner than he'd ever been before. Because today he was going to have to stand up to someone greater and more terrible than anyone else he'd ever known.

When he reached his flat he closed the door and bolted it behind him. Then he walked to the north wall of the room, pulled a large volume from a bookshelf, opened it, and put it on the floor.

Finally he rolled back the rug, drew a pentagon in chalk on the floor, and dropped to his knees

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before the book. From this he began to read a chant in monotone, moving his arms in rhythm to his voice.

The chant ended. Slowly a pink haze formed over the pentagon; the pink color changed to a modest white, and the haze resolved itself into a tall, austere figure clad in billowing robes. From its back protruded a pair of willow-like, feathery wings.

"Yes?" said the figure, in a soft, gentle voice.

Priestley looked up, and shrank back. "My Satan," he said in a strangled voice, "you're wonderful! You're more wonderful than I ever imagined you could be!" He hid his eyes and repressed a shudder.

"My dear man, it is my business to do good and wonderful," said the figure. "And I am certain that you did not call me here merely to disparage my character. What do you want?"

"Uh," Priestley began dazedly, still stricken with awe by the thing in the pentagon. "I want three wishes . . ."

The angel stopped him there. "Hold it, my son. You get only two wishes nowadays, you know."

Priestley's eyebrows raised. "What?!" he said. "Lucifer bless it to heaven! Why can't I have three any more?"

"Price of living," said the angel. "We can't aford more than two wishes. And besides, we're relatively new to this business."

Priestley caught a fly in his hand and began to pull its wings off. "Uh-huh. That N-bomb war that knocked off all the Christians in 2304 and left only a group of Santanists who'd been trying to dig to Hell and were 2000 feet underground at the time of the explosions sort of put you angels at a disadvantage, what? I can see that you'd have trouble—what with not knowing any of the tricks of the trade, as Satan did. . . ."

"Oh, Satan was quite generous," said the angel. "He sold us his entire stock of wish-granting material for only thirty second-rate souls. Quite generous."

"Ah-ha," said Priestley. "Then you can make a man immortal?"

"Well—moderately," said the angel with a dubious look.

"What do you mean, 'Moderately?'" asked Priestley. "I want to be immortal; that's my first wish. I've already knocked off one wish because you're so tight-fisted. Now what's this about moderate immortality?"

DUE to the small number of customers that partonize us, we have added a small loophole —for our own protection, you understand—to the old eternal-life rat race."

"Loophole?" said Priestley suspiciously. "What do you think I am, a complete idiot?"

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"Now, hold on," said the angel. "You will be immortal, will be virtually indestructable, and wlil feel no pain; but there must be a certain substance—one of our choice—with which you can be killed. We will take no direct steps to bring about your death by the use of this substance—that will be left completely to chance. All you will have to do will be to keep away from it for the rest of eternity, and you'll be in the clear. Of course if you should happen to die, you know what the payment for the wishes is . . ."

"Of course I know what it is," said Priestley.

The angel nodded, and grinned. "If you die, you will join our Angel Choir, and be led away to eternal bliss. . . ."

Priestley had to hold back another shudder. He couldn't let *that* happen. "Assuming that I accept the terms of the first wish,' he said, "my second wish is for a money-pouch that automatically refills itself when emptied."

"Greedy, aren't you?" said the angel. "Very well—I have here" —he produced a leather purse, bound in leather thongs—"an 18th-century model, one that was used by a little old pirate who opened it only on Mondays. . . ."

"Never mind the spiel, that'll do," said Priestley, snatching the pouch from the angel. He inspected the thongs and outside material closely, and then sighed. "Good—no metal," he said, and smiled thinly at the angel. "I'll be generous; I accept the terms of the first wish, and choose for the substance involved—any metal you can name!" He threw back his head and laughed at his own shrewdness.

ONE hundred years before, in 26th century, all metals had been replaced entirely by plastic materials: cars, missiles, planes, motors, and even money, were all made of various forms of plastic; all metals had been buried as "hot" after the N-bomb war. No solid metal was left on the surface of the earth.

Priestley stopped laughing. "And don't try to pull any abstract shenanigans, like killing me with small particles of iron that might be floating around in the air, either," he said.

"No, no, I assure you, my son," said the angel. "An amount of metal sufficient to kill a normal man will be needed to kill you. What do you think I am, some sort of cheat? We're Good up there, you know.

"Our bargain is already on record in the Heavenly Ledgers, and goes into effect as of now. Your soul for two wishes." He looked upward. "*Pax vobiscum*, my son—and good luck."

Priestley blinked. The pentagon was empty.

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BLESSED angel. He sounded so divinely confident—and how could he be? There was no metal left within 3000 feet of the surface of the earth—and Priestley wasn't about to go digging around for any. So why that canny smile on the angel's beatific face?

Priestley scowled and left the apartment. He had a purse that would cough up money endlessly, and he was going to use it.

On the way to the bar he kicked a cup from a blind man's hand, grabbed a peppermint stick from a five-year-old, and knocked a load of packages from an old lady's hands.

When the old lady turned to face him, he recognized her; but this time she was holding a plastic disintegrator in her hand. "I'm sick and tired of your pushing me around," she gritted, gesturing expressively with the gun.

"Now—wait a minute," Priestley began—and then stopped. What was he about to crawl for? He was immortal! He stepped forward, a smile coming to his lips. "Okay, granny," he said. "Shoot."

Granny shot. The force of the disintegrator beam knocked Priestley into the street. He was propelled to the edge of an open manhole; there he teetered for a split second and fell through.

He landed on the slick, mirror-polished plastic surface of a sewer pipe. Picking himself up, he looked around to get his bearings. He was in a small division of the sewer, with shining plastic walls on either side of him; he saw that the pipes in those walls had been closed. The sewer was out of use.

Something fell past his face. He looked up, squinted confusedly for a moment, and then realized that the money-pouch had been caught on the edge of the manhole when he fell through. Its leather thongs had burst, and it was pouring money into the narrow confines of the sewer section.

Priestley looked at the money, and screamed.

The bag had originally belonged to an 18th century pirate, as the angel had said.

And in the 18th century, money had been made largely of gold.

And gold, unfortunately, was a metal.

The doubloons poured endlessly out of the unemptiable sack, streaming down over Priestley, slowly filling the sewer section. Within a matter of minutes, he knew, he would be crushed to death. He staggered back, dazed, and screamed again as his reflection loomed up at him from one side of the sewer pipe.

Wings were beginning to sprout from his shoulderblades.

THE END

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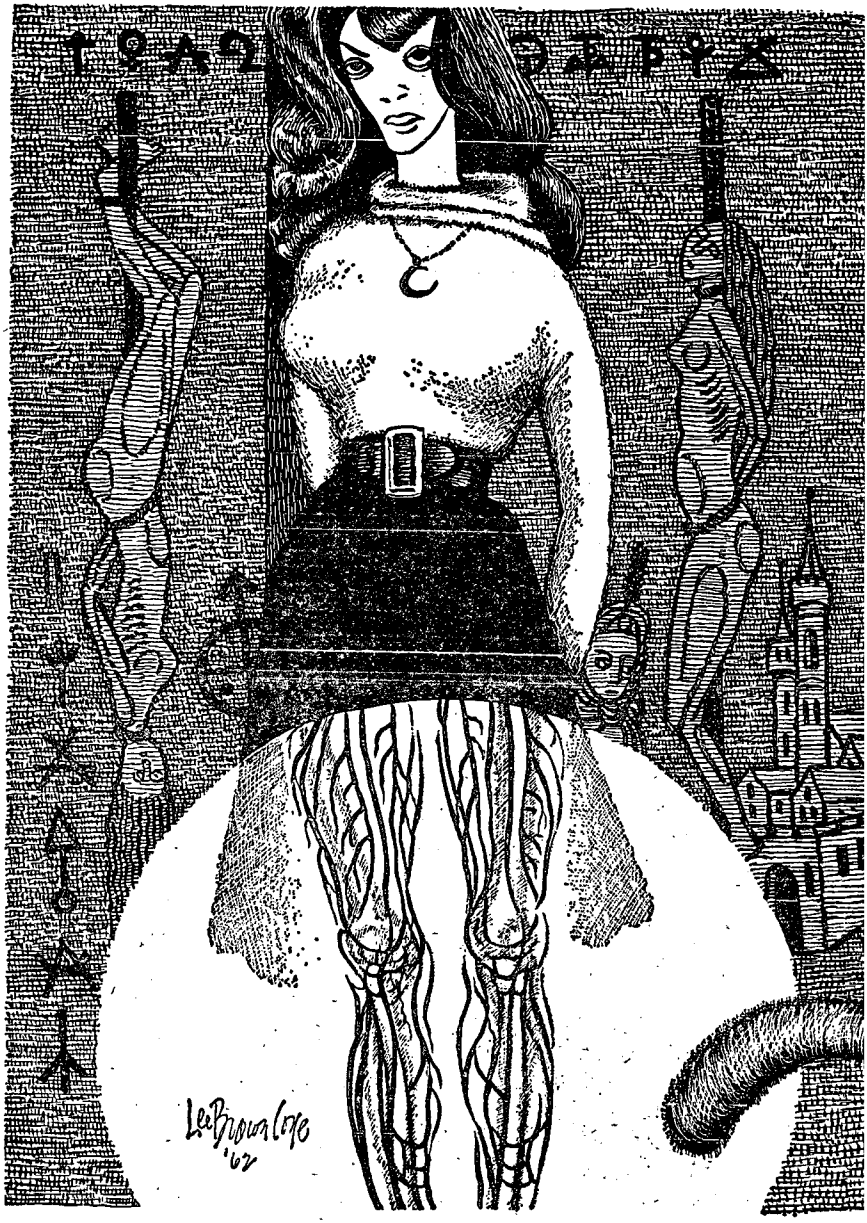

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Have you ever wondered what makes these glamorous movie stars do the scandalous things they do? Why they revel in getting their names in the papers? The reason may be weightier than you think.

THERE's nothing left for it—I've got to open the casket," said Vividy Sheer, glaring at the ugly thing on its square of jeweled and gold-worked altar cloth. The most photogenic face in the world was grim as a valkyry's this Malibu morning.

the CASKET-DEMON

By FRITZ LEIBER

Illustrator COYE

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"No," shuddered Miss Bricker, her secretary. "Vividy, you once let me peek in through the little window and I didn't sleep for a week."

"It would make the wrong sort of publicity," said Maury Gender, the nordic film-queen's press chief. "Besides that, I value my life." His gaze roved uneasily across the gray "Pains of the Damned" tapestries lining three walls of the conference room up to its black-beamed 20-foot ceiling.

"You forget, baroness, the runic rhymes of the Prussian Nostrodamus," said Dr. Rumanescue, Vividy's astrologist and family magician. "'*Wenn der Kassette-Tuefel . . .*'—or, to translate roughly, 'When the casket-demon is let out, The life of the Von Sheer is in doubt.'"

"My triple-great grandfather held out against the casket-demon for months," Vividy Sheer countered.

"Yes, with a demi-regiment of hussars for bodyguard, and in spite of their sabers and horse pistols he was found dead in bed at his Silesian hunting lodge within a year. Dead in bed and black as a beetle—and the eight hussars in the room with him as night-guard permanently out of their wits with fear."

"I'm stronger than he was—I've conquered Hollywood," Vividy said, her blue eyes sparking and her face all valkyry. "But in any case if I'm to live weeks, let alone months, I *must* keep my name in the papers, as all three of you very well know."

"Hey, hey, what goes on here?" demanded Max Rath, Vividy Sheer's producer, for whom the medieval torture-tapestries had noiselessly parted and closed at the bidding of electric eyes. His own little shrewd ones scanned the four people, veered to the black gnarly wrought-iron casket, no bigger than a cigar box, with its tiny peep-hole of cloudy glass set in the top, and finally came to rest on the only really incongruous object in the monastically-appointed hall—a lavender-tinted bathroom scales.

Vividy glared at him, Dr. Rumanescue shrugged eloquently, Miss Bricker pressed her lips together, Maury Gender licked his own nervously and at last said, "Well, Vividy thinks she ought to have more publicity—every-day-without-skips publicity in the biggest papers and on the networks. Also, she's got a weight problem."

MAX RATH surveyed in its flimsy dress of silk jersey the most voluptuous figure on six continents and any number of islands, including Ireland and Bali. "You got no weight-problem, Viv," he pronounced. "An ounce either way would be 480

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grains away from pneumatic perfection." Vividy flicked at her bosom contemptuously. Rath's voice changed. "Now as for your name not being in the papers lately, that's a very wise idea—my own, in fact—and must be kept up. *Bride of God* is due to premiere in four months—the first picture about the life of a nun not to be thumbs-downed by any religious or non-religious group, even in the sticks. We want to keep it that way. When you toured the Florence night-clubs with Biff Parowan and took the gondola ride with that what's-his-name bellhop, the Pope slapped your wrist, but that's all he did—*Bride*'s still not on the Index. But the wrist-slap was a hint—and one more reason why for the next year there mustn't be one tiny smidgin of personal scandal or even-so-called harmless notoriety linked to the name of Vividy Sheer.

"Besides that, Viv," he added more familiarly, "the reporters and the reading public were on the verge of getting very sick of the way your name was turning up on the front page every day—and mostly because of chasing, at that. Film stars are like goddesses—they can't be seen too often, there's got to be a little reserve, a little mystery.

"Aw, cheer up, Viv. I know it's tough, but Liz and Jayne and Marilyn all learned to do without the daily headline and so can you. Believe an old timer: euphoric pills are a safer and more lasting kick."

Vividy, who had been working her face angrily throughout Rath's lecture, now filled her cheeks and spat out her breath contemptuously, as her thrice-removed grandfather might have at the maunderings of an aged major domo.

"You're a fool, Max," she said harshly. "Kicks are for nervous virgins, the vanity of a spoilt child. *For me, being in the headlines every day is a matter of life or death.*"

Rath frowned uncomprehendingly.

"That's the literal truth she's telling you, Max," Maury Gender put in earnestly. "You see, this business happens to be tied up with what you might call the darker side of Vividy's aristocratic East Prussian heritage."

Miss Bricker stubbed out a cigarette and said, "Max, remember the trouble you had with that Spanish star Marta Martinez who turned out to be a *bruja*—a witch? Well, you picked something a little bit more out of the ordinary, Max, when you picked a Junker."

The highlights shifted on Dr. Rumanescue's thick glasses and shiny head as he nodded solemnly. He said, "There is a rune in

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the Doomsbook of the Von Sheers. I will translate." He paused. Then: " 'When the world has nothing more to say, The last of the Sheers will fade away.' "

AS if thinking aloud, Rath said softly, "Funny, I'd forgotten totally about that East Prussian background. We always played it way down out of sight because of the Nazi association —and the Russian too." He chuckled, just a touch nervously. " '. . . fade away,' " he quoted. "Now why not just 'die?' Oh, to make the translation rhyme, I suppose." He shook himself, as if to come awake. "Hey," he demanded, "what is it actually? Is somebody blackmailing Vividy? Some fascist or East German commie group? Maybe with the dope on her addictions and private cures, or her affair with Geri Wilson?"

"Repeat: a fool!" Vividy's chest was heaving but her voice was icy. "For your information, Dr. 'Escue's translation was literal. *Day by day, ever since you first killed my news stories, I have been losing weight.*"

"It's a fact, Max," Maury Gender put in hurriedly. "The news decline and the weight loss are matching curves. Believe it or not, she's down to a quarter normal."

Miss Bricker nodded with a shiver, disturbing the smoke wreathes around her. She said, "It's the business of an actress fading out from lack of publicity. But this time, so help me, *it's literal.*"

"I have been losing both *weight and mass,*" Vividy continued sharply. "Not by getting thinner, but *less substantial.* If I had my back to the window you'd notice it."

Rath stared at her, then looked penetratingly at the other three, as if to discover confirmation that it was all a gag. But they only looked back at him with uniformly solemn and unhappy—and vaguely frightened —expressions. "I don't get it," he said.

"The scales, Vividy," Miss Bricker suggested.

The film star stood up with an exaggerated carefulness and stepped onto the small rubber-topped violet platform. The white disk whirled under the glass window and came to rest at 37.

She said crisply, "I believe the word you used, Max, was 'pneumatic.' Did you happen to mean I'm inflated with hydrogen?"

"You've still got on your slippers," Miss Bricker pointed out.

With even greater carefulness, steadying herself a moment by the darkly gleaming table-edge, Vividy stepped out of her slippers and again onto the scales. This time the disk stopped at 27.

"The soles and heels are lead,

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fabric-covered," she rapped out to Rath. "I wear them so I won't blow over the edge when I take a walk on the terrace. Perhaps you now think I ought to be able to jump and touch the ceiling. Convincing, wouldn't it be? I rather wish I could, but my strength has decreased proportionately with my weight and mass."

"Those scales are gimmicked," Rath asserted with conviction. He stooped and grabbed at one of the slippers. His fingers slipped off it at the first try. Then he slowly raised and hefted it. "What sort of gag is this?" he demanded of Vividy. "Dammit, it does weigh five pounds."

She didn't look at him. "Maury, get the flashlight," she directed.

WHILE the press chief rummaged in a tall Spanish cabinet, Miss Bricker moved to the view window that was the room's fourth wall and flicked an invisible beam. Rapidly the tapestry-lined drapes crawled together from either end, blotting out the steep, burnt-over, barely regrown Malibu hillside and briefly revealing in changing folds "The Torments of Beauty" until the drapes met, blotting out all light whatever.

Maury snapped on a flashlight long as his forearm. It lit their faces weirdly from below and dimly showed the lovely gray ladies in pain beyond them. Then he put it behind Vividy, who stood facing Rath, and moved it up and down.

As if no thicker anywhere than fingers, the lovely form of the German film star became a twin-stemmed flower in shades of dark pink. The arteries were a barely visible twining, the organs blue-edged, the skeleton deep cherry.

"That some kind of X-ray?" Rath asked, the words coming out in a breathy rush.

"You think they got technicolor, hand-size, screenless X-ray sets?" Maury retorted.

"I think they must have," Rath told him in a voice quiet but quite desperate.

"That's enough, Maury," Vividy directed. "Bricker, the drapes." Then as the harsh rectangle of daylight swiftly reopened, she looked coldly at Rath and said, "You may take me by the shoulders and shake me. I give you permission."

The producer complied. Two seconds after he had grasped her he was shrinking back, his hands and arms violently trembling. It had been like shaking a woman stuffed with eiderdown. A woman warm and silky-skinned to the touch, but light almost as feathers. A pillow woman.

"I believe, Vividy," he gasped out. "I believe it all now." Then his voice went far away. "And to

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think I first cottoned to you because of that name Sheer. It sounded like silk stockings—luxurious, delicate . . . *insubstantial.* Oh my God!" His voice came part way back. "And you say this is all happening because of some old European witchcraft? Some crazy rhymes out of the past? How do you really think about it, how do you explain it?"

"Much of the past has no explanation at all," Dr. Rumanescue answered him. "And the further in the past, the less. The Von Sheers are a very old family, tracing back to pre-Roman times. The runes themselves—"

Vividy held up her palm to the astrologist to stop.

"Very well, you believe. Good," she said curtly to Rath, carefully sitting down at the table again behind the ugly black casket on its square of altar cloth. She continued in the same tones, "The question now is: how do I get the publicity I need to keep me from fading out altogether, the front-page publicity that will perhaps even restore me, build me up?"

LIKE a man in a dream Rath let himself down into a chair across the table from her and looked out the window over her shoulder. The three others watched them with mingled calculation and anxiety.

Vividy said sharply, "First, can the release date on *Bride of God* be advanced—to next Sunday week, say? I think I can last that long."

"Impossible, quite impossible," Rath muttered, still seeming to study something on the pale green hillside scrawled here and there with black.

"Then hear another plan. There is an unfrocked Irish clergyman named Kerrigan who is infatuated with me. A maniac but rather sweet. He's something of a poet—he'd like me light as a feather, find nothing horrible in it. Kerrigan and I will travel together to Monaco—"

"No, no!" Rath cried out in sudden anguish, looking at her at last. "No matter the other business, witchcraft or whatever, we can't have anything like that! It would ruin the picture, kill it dead. It would mean my money and all our jobs. Vividy, I haven't told you, but a majority committee of stockholders wants me to get rid of you and reshoot *Bride,* starring Alicia Killian. They're deathly afraid of a last-minute Sheer scandal. Vividy, you've always played square with me, even at your craziest. You wouldn't . . ."

"No, I wouldn't, even to save my life," she told him, her voice mixing pride and contempt with an exactitude that broke through Maury Gender's miseries and

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thrilled him with her genuine dramatic talent. He said, "Max, we've been trying to convince Vividy that it might help to use some routine non-scandalous publicity."

"Yes," Miss Bricker chimed eagerly, "we have a jewel robbery planned for tonight, a kitchen fire for tomorrow."

Vividy laughed scornfully. "And I suppose the day after that I get lost in Griffith Park for three hours, next I rededicate an orphanage, autograph a Nike missile, and finally I have a poolside press interview and bust a brassiere strap. That's cheap stuff, the last resort of has-beens. Besides I don't think it would work."

Rath, his eyes again on the hillside, said absently, "To be honest, I don't think it would either. After the hot stuff you've always shot them, the papers wouldn't play."

"Very well," Vividy said crisply, "that brings us back to where we started. There's nothing left for it—I've got to . . ."

"Hey wait a second!" Rath burst out with a roar of happy excitement. "We've got your physical condition to capitalize on! Your loss of weight is a scientific enigma, a miracle—and absolutely nonscandalous! It'll mean headlines for months, for years. Every woman will want to know your secret. So will the spacemen. We'll reveal you first to UCLA, or USC, then the Mayo Clinic and maybe Johns Hopkins . . . Hey, what's the matter, why aren't you all enthusiastic about this?"

MAURY GENDER and Miss Bricker looked toward Dr. Rumanescue, who coughed and said gently, "Unfortunately, there is a runic couplet in the Von Sheer Doomsbook that seems almost certainly to bear on that very point. Translated: 'If a Sheer be weighed in the market place, he'll vanish away without a trace.'"

"In any case, I refuse to exhibit myself as a freak," Vividy added hotly. "I don't mind how much publicity I get because of my individuality, my desires, *my will*—no matter how much it shocks and titillates the little people, the law-abiders, the virgins and eunuchs and moms—but to be confined to a hospital and pried over by doctors and physiologists . . . No!"

She fiercely brought her fist down on the table with a soft, insubsantial thud that made Rath draw back and set Miss Bricker shuddering once more. Then Vividy Sheer said, "For the last time: There's nothing left for it—I've got to open the casket!"

"Now what's in the casket?" Rath asked with apprehension.

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There was another uncomfortable silence. Then Dr. Rumanescue said softly, with a little shrug, "The casket-demon. The Doom of the Von Sheers." He hesitated. "Think of the genie in the bottle. A genie with black fangs."

Rath asked, "How's that going to give Vividy publicity?"

Vividy answered him. "It will attack me, try to destroy me. Every night, as long as I last. No scandal, only horror. But there will be headlines—oh yes, there will be headlines. And I'll stop fading."

She pushed out a hand toward the little wrought-iron box. All their eyes were on it. With its craggy, tortured surface, it looked as if it had been baked in Hell, the peep-hole of milky glass an eye blinded by heat.

Miss Bricker said, "Vividy, don't."

Dr. Rumanescue breathed, "I advise against it."

Maury Gender said, "Vividy, I don't think this is going to work out the way you think it will. Publicity's a tricky thing. I think—"

He broke off as Vividy clutched her hand back to her bosom. Her eyes stared as if she felt something happening inside her. Then, groping along the table, hanging onto its edge clumsily as though her fingers were numbed, she made her way to the scale and maneuvered herself onto it. This time the disk stopped at 19.

With a furious yet strengthless haste, like a scarecrow come alive and floating as much as walking, the beautiful woman fought her way back to the box and clutched it with both hands and jerked it towards her. It moved not at all at first, then a bare inch as she heaved. She gave up trying to pull it closer and leaned over it, her sharply bent waist against the table edge, and tugged and pried at the casket's top, pressing rough projections as if they were parts of an antique combination-lock.

MAURY GENDER took a step toward her, then stopped. None of the others moved even that far to help. They watched her as if she were themselves strengthless in a nightmare—a ghost woman as much tugged by the tiny box as she was tugging at it. A ghost woman in full life colors—except that Max Rath, sitting just opposite, saw the hillside glowing very faintly through her.

With a whir and a clash the top of the box shot up on its hinges, there was a smoky puff and a stench that paled faces and set Miss Bricker gagging, then something small and intensely black and very fast dove out of the box and scuttled across the

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altar cloth and down a leg of the table and across the floor and under the tapestry and was gone.

Maury Gender had thrown himself out of its course, Miss Bricker had jerked her feet up under her, as if from a mouse, and so had Max Rath. But Vividy Sheer stood up straight and tall, no longer strengthless-seeming. There was icy sky in her blue eyes and a smile on her face—a smile of self-satisfaction that became tinged with scorn as she said, "You needn't be frightened. We won't see it again until after dark. Then—well, at least it will be interesting. Doubtless his hussars saw many interesting things during the seven months my military ancestor lasted."

"You mean you'll be attacked by a black rat?" Max Rath faltered.

"It will grow," said Dr. Rumanescue quietly.

Scanning the hillside again, Max Rath winced, as if it had occurred to him that one of the black flecks out there might now be *it*. He looked at his watch. "Eight hours to sunset," he said dully. "We got to get through eight hours."

Vividy laughed ripplingly. "We'll all jet to New York," she said with decision. "That way there'll be three hours' less agony for Max. Besides, I think Times Square would be a good spot for the first . . . appearance. Or maybe Radio City. Maury, call the airport! Bricker, pour me a brandy!"

* * *

NEXT day the New York tabloids carried half-column stories telling how the tempestuous film star Vividy Sheer had been attacked or at least menaced in front of the United Nations Building at 11:59 P.M. by a large black dog, whose teeth had bruised her without drawing blood, and which had disappeared, perhaps in company with a boy who had thrown a stink bomb, before the first police arrived. The *Times* and the *Herald Tribune* carried no stories whatever. The item got on Associated Press but was not used by many papers.

The day after that *The News of the World* and *The London Daily Mirror* reported on inside pages that the German-American film actress Vividy Sheer had been momentarily mauled in the lobby of Claridge's Hotel by a black-cloaked and black-masked man who moved with a stoop and very quickly—as if, in fact, he were more interested in getting away fast than in doing any real damage to the Nordic beauty, who had made no appreciable effort to resist the attacker, whirling in his brief grip as if she were a weightless clay figure. The *News of the World* also reproduced in one-and-a-half columns

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a photograph of Vividy in a low-cut dress showing just below her neck an odd black clutch-mark left there by the attacker, or perhaps drawn beforehand in india ink, the caption suggested. In *The London Times* was a curt angry editorial crying shame at notoriety-mad actresses and conscienceless press agents who staged disgusting scenes in respectable places to win publicity for questionable films—even to the point of setting off stench bombs—and suggesting that the best way for all papers to handle such nauseous hoaxes was to ignore them utterly—and cooperate enthusiastically but privately with the police and the deportation authorities.

On the third day, as a few eyewitnesses noted but were quite unwilling to testify (What Frenchman wants to be laughed at?) Vividy Sheer was snatched off the top of the Eiffel Tower by a great ghostly black paw, or by a sinuous whirlwind laden with coal dust and then deposited under the Arc de Triomphe—or she and her confederates somehow created the illusion that this enormity had occured. But when the Sheer woman along with four of her film cohorts, reported the event to the Sureté, the French police refused to do anything more than smile knowingly and shrug, though one inspector was privately puzzled by something about the Boche film-bitch's movements—she seemed to be drawn along by her companions rather than walking on her own two feet. Perhaps drugs were involved, Inspector Gibaud decided—cocaine or mescalin. What an indecency though, that the woman should smear herself with shoeblacking to bolster her lewd fantasy!

Not one paper in the world would touch the story, not even one of the Paris dailies carried a humorous item about *Le bête noir et énorme*—some breeds of nonsense are unworthy even of humorous reporting. They are too silly (and perhaps in some silly way a shade too disturbing) for even silly-season items.

DURING the late afternoon of the fourth day, the air was very quiet in Rome—the quiet that betokens a coming storm—and Vividy insisted on taking a walk with Max Rath. She wore a coif and dress of white silk jersey, the only material her insubstantial body could tolerate. Panchromatic make-up covered her black splotches. She had recruited her strength by sniffing brandy—the only way in which her semi-porous flesh could now absorb the fierce liquid. Max was fretful, worried that a passersby would see through his companion, and he was continually maneuvering so that she would not

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be between them and the lowering sky. Vividy was tranquil, speculating without excitement about what the night might bring and whether a person who fades away dies doubly or not at all and what casket-demons do in the end to their victims and whether the Gods themselves depend for their existence on publicity.

As they were crossing a children's park somewhere near the Piazza dell' Esquilino, there was a breath of wind, Vividy moaned very quietly, her form grew faint, and she blew off Max's arm and down the path, traveling a few inches above it, indistinct as a camera image projected on dust motes. Children cried out softly and pointed. An eddy caught her, whirled her up, then back toward Max a little, then she was gone.

Immediately afterward mothers and priests came running and seven children swore they had been granted a vision of the Holy Virgin, while four children maintained they had seen the ghost or double of the film star Vividy Sheer. Certainly nothing material remained of the courageous East Prussian except a pair of lead slippers—size four-and-one-half—covered with white brocade.

Returning to the hotel suite and recounting his story, Max Rath was surprised to find that the news did not dispel his companions' nervous depression.

Miss Bricker, after merely shrugging at Max's story, was saying, "Maury, what to you suppose really happened to those eight hussars," and Maury was replying, "I don't want to imagine, only you got to remember that that time the casket-demon wasn't balked of his victim."

Max interrupted loudly, "Look, cut the morbidity. It's too bad about Vividy, but what a break for *Bride of God!* Those kids' stories are perfect publicity—and absolutely non-scandalous. *Bride*'ll gross forty million! Hey! Wake up! I know it's been a rough time, but now it's over."

Maury Gender and Miss Bricker slowly shook their heads. Dr. Rumanescue motioned Max to approach the window. While he came on with slow steps, the astrologist said, "Unfortunately, there is still another pertinent couplet. Roughly: 'If the demon be balked of a Von Sheer kill, On henchmen and vassals he'll work his will!" He glanced at his wrist. "It is three minutes to sunset." He pointed out the window. "Do you see, coming up the Appian Way, that tall black cloud with blue lightening streaking through it?"

"You mean the cloud with a head like a wolf?" Max faltered.

"Precisely," Dr. Rumanescue nodded. "Only, for us, it is not a cloud," he added resignedly and returned to his book. **THE END**

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At last—an explanation of the origin of Moderan . . . and the horrible future that awaits its new-metal people.

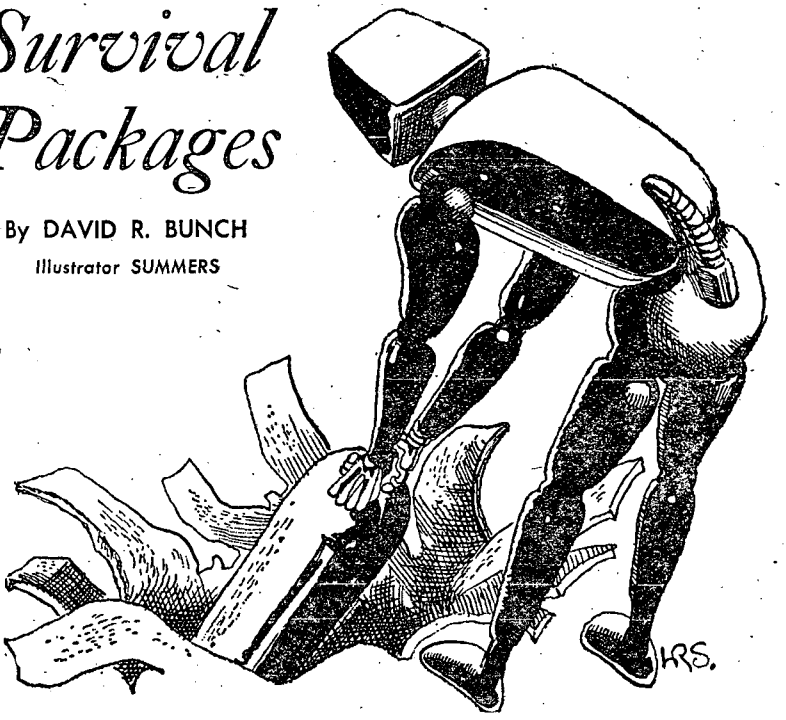
Survival Packages

By DAVID R. BUNCH

Illustrator SUMMERS

NEVER before had a species faced with extermination prepared so elaborately for survival. All over the world they came up that spring, burst through our plastic yards, spread confusion around our Great Walls, even broke out in our very forts if that was where they happened to have been planted.

Our Warners were helpless out on the Early Line. They came from underground! We had to depend on the "ears" of our Strongholds for warning, and that meant the Boxheads were sometimes less than yards away at the first alert. The "ears" of my Stronghold are big velvety coneballs with millions of tiny reac-



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tors set in the cones. These hover in orbit—some dozens of them—over my fortress permanently, and they listen day and night for even the tiniest variation in the normal sound-buzz. When things are usual there is a quiet humming emanates from the gently-working mechanisms of the automation that serves me, and the cone-balls ride in their glinty majesty like big silvery eyes whirling, testing always for my safety. The Warning Room sleeps quietly with the big screens empty then, and the megaphones gape silent. Then all is well.

But the day that crunching rending sound came from below! One of the cone-balls froze in its orbit and hung there sending the dread signal of invasion through the speakers in the Warning Room. I rushed all my available weapons men to the indicated place at once, and I brought the walking missiles down with great dispatch. I wheeled in the White Witch rockets and deployed them, and I thumbed back the doors where the hand bombs were, all as I had rehearsed it many times in my war games. On top of all this I opened the speaker tube to the demolition box in the Mountain of the Lost Hope Stand. In other words, in the ultimate contingency when all seems otherwise at length but really lost, I'll whisper the Word into the speaker tube, and that will signal the demolition box far away in the Mountain of the Lost Hope Stand. Then my fortress will blow—I, my enemy, everything. I do not intend to lose alone, you see.

THE thing came through while we watched the spot under the warning cone-ball between my Tenth and Eleventh walls. With a crash like house sides falling the floor of my fort lifted up between the two walls and, as the floor shattered, a square metal head, followed by massive shoulders and arms of what seemed tubular steel, came through a hole in the ground. It did not seem warlike, but who could know what the tricks, what the awful slyness and the terrible intents afoot in that box-shaped head?—It squatted by the hole and dropped its hands inside. The hands, which were made of huge hinged rods, grasped something, and the tubular arms and shoulders heaved strongly until a capsule came through. The capsule was about the size of a one-man space boat, and in shape it was not much different, with the cylindrical form and beautiful lines of a sun rocket.

My weapons men stood nervous. All my metal parts clanked and zinged, and the flesh-strips holding me together flooded cold sweat. Though my entire fortress was alerted, and at a nod from

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me, I felt, this visitor and his capsule could be shattered, I was scared. I wanted to give the signal to blast him at once, yet something stayed me. Perhaps it was the way he worked, this Boxhead, so sure, so preplanned seeming, so inevitable. There is something chill, something particularly arresting about any behavior that proceeds without deviation, completely oblivious to surroundings and as though part of a destiny. When he had the full long length of the capsule out of the hole, he laid the ponderous object down gently on a level stretch of plastic. Then he went back to the hole and peered inside and seemed to be signaling. I grabbed two weapons men for support and stood with the horror beating about me. And then the second one climbed through! a carbon copy of the first Boxhead. They exchanged no word or greeting that I noticed, but turned at once to the capsule. After a short while of testing for center they went one to each end and, twisting opposite ways, they gently opened the capsule into two parts. From the front part of the halved capsule they extracted a cylinder of a clear wax-like substance containing what looked to be a misshapen flesh-colored ball with shriveled flesh-colored attachments. Working on without a pause in their peculiar hitch-jerky motions the two Boxheads found tools in the lower half of the capsule with which to chip away the wax and free the strange shriveled object from its waxy bed. When they had the misshapen ball and its attachments like some small weird scarecrow of the Old Days full-length along the plastic, they returned to the lower half of the capsule and, hitch-jerky, inexorably, unstoppable-seeming, they extracted many smaller objects. With things from these smaller objects—fluids, pumps and gases —they went to work inflating the scarecrow form.

I WATCHED them patiently. I let them alone. I was not scared now. Something old in my mind was remembering a year long ago when man had accepted Doomstime. I was young then, a mere child just starting to be conditioned by the blasting, when the "things" were planted down. But I remembered. YES!—When the Boxheads were through I signaled them to bury the capsule, fix back the plastic yard sheets as best they could and go. I let them out through the Eleventh Gate into the void of our plastic-yard-sheet world, and deep in my flesh-strips I almost felt tears turn to rain as three things wandered away, two Boxheads and between them a weird plump scarecrow, dazed, blinking and, I suspected, sore afraid.

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And this went on all over the world that spring, in every quarter of our plastic globe. The Boxheads came through like flowers, one might say, like spring flowers used to come bursting up through the vulgar soil. Of course now we bloom flowers up through the lidded yard holes at a nod from the Central Commission for Beauty, pushbutton them up when it's time, and they nod on spring-metal stems in the plastic fields of summer until it's autumn.

But these—oh, so grimmer than flowers—were man's hope at Doomshour, planted away in the time capsules and swung between two powerful robots, sunk deep down in the earth and set in the tapes of the robots to come up after a sleep of a hundred years. All the lands of the earth had done this, that is all of the lands that were sophisticated enough in their sciences to have the robots, the timed tapes and the time capsules. Those that were not sophisticated went on lying in the sun on small islands, perhaps, or puttered about in the snow in far northern places, maybe, or slept in the jungles trees, not knowing or caring how unsophisticated they were, how out of the race they were, how terribly blank were their zeros in the great advancement of man. While the advanced ones, the sophisticated ones, after planting the capsules down, made last minute check on their blasters, thumbed the lids back from their silos, issued their ultimatums and sprang the war birds up, screaming, SCREAMING!! For the Great Five Minutes of War.

But somewhere and manywheres was blunder. Missiles wandered away and did not home in on their towns. Minds faltered at the critical second-of-GO-zero. Ships-Captains slid underseas in their crafts with the missiles and took stock of terrible choices, and some dilly-dallied. Manned warbirds found themselves somehow late at the right places of drop and at the wrong places early. And key men in command posts all over the world cracked just a little with the awesome weight of it all. In short the beautiful precision that was blueprinted to destroy the world in a clean five minutes of blasting was bungled. Man, at his own funeral, was late and unsure and imprecise and unreliable, as usual. The Great Five Minutes, boggled, dragged on into Five Terrible Years, five years shaking the world with demolition. And man changed in those five years. And the world changed. You may even say there was progress. But—well . . . ? Just say things moved . . . on.

Flesh and blood became commodities of the impossible past almost, what with all the pollution of the air, sea and soil. We

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replaced the human body after the Big Five Years, when we found flesh that was properly conditioned by explosions. Even vital organs could be replaced we learned, down to a minimal amount of the flesh-strip, or shored up and made to last with new-metal. We fed ourselves introven, and it worked! and our small hard hearts became engines that drove a thin green blood through tube-miles in thin flesh-strips. Sentiment was soon quite gone from us; and our souls, if ever we had them, were surely now no more. But fears we retained—they were with us large and small and LARGE. YES! We kept normal fears and abnormal fears and normal desires and abnormal desires. We desired to live; we feared to die. We desired to kill; we feared to die. We defended ourselves. We did live!

AFTER the Big Five Years only those could go on who had been revised of course. And our planet—we could part with much of it now. Being creatures of only a little flesh and blood we had small use for the seas and even smaller use for the air. We space-signaled the Martians our willingness to part with most of our atmosphere any time they found a way to space-lift it up to their place. And the bulk of the oceans would have been up for grabs except we might need them for certain minerals and to keep us balanced as we should be in the System. The polluted soil we soon covered—hills and valleys and plains—with cool white plastic. YES! Ours is a clean place now, except for the contaminated purplish air and the poisoned green-black seas.

The plump scarecrows between the twin robots all over the world that year? Children! SURVIVAL CHILDREN! All of us remembered them when they came bursting up that spring, remembered how a chosen few million, their blood drained, their lives made dormant, had been planted away in the wax, like strange seeds, that time so long ago when man had accepted Doomshour. But we had forgotten them in the years since of our fears and our constant watchfulness. They were children, strange, from another century. We tried, but we found we could not help them. Their flesh had not been seasoned enough by the explosions. They would not fit into our Program. With their robots they wandered homeless over our white land, strange children born twice into a terrible place, confused and a century out of their time, until death overtook them. And now only the robots wander, in strange twos, up and down; and sometimes, true to something

(*Continued on page 123*)

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He was a comsic gate-crasher, seeking the ultimate emotional experience. Would he find it in . . .

A THING OF TERRIBLE BEAUTY

By HARRISON DENMARK

Illustrator BLAIR

HOW like a god of the Epicureans is the audience, at a time like this! Powerless to alter the course of events, yet better informed than the characters, they might rise to their feet and cry out "Do not!"—but the blinding of Oedipus would still ensue, and the inevitable knot in Jocasta's scarlet would stop her breathing still.

But no one rises, of course. They know better. They, too, are inevitably secured by the strange bonds of the tragedy. The gods can only observe and know, they cannot alter circumstance, nor wrestle with *ananke*.

My host is already anticipating the thing he calls "catharsis." My search has carried me far, and my choice was a good one. Phillip Devers lives in the theater like a worm lives in an apple, a paralytic in an iron lung. It is his world.

And I live in Phillip Devers.

For ten years his ears and eyes have been my ears and eyes. For ten years I have tasted the sensitive perceptions of a great critic of the drama, and he has never known it.

He has come close—his mind is agile, his imagination vivid—but his classically trained intellect is too strong, his familiarity with psychopathology too intimate to permit that final leap from logic to intuition, and an admission of my existence. At times, before he drops off to sleep, he toys with the thought of attempting communication, but the next morning he always rejects it—which is well. What could we possibly have to say to one another?

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—Now that inchoate scream from the dawn of time, and Oedipus stalks the stage in murky terror!

How exquisite!

I wish that I could know the other half. Devers says there are two things in a complete experience—a moving towards, called pity, and a moving away from, called terror. It is the latter which I feel, which I have always sought; I do not understand the other, even when my host quivers and his vision goes moistly dim.

I should like very much to cultivate the total response. Unfortunately, my time here is limited. I have hounded beauty through a thousand stellar cells, and here I learned that a man named Aristotle defined it. It is unfortunate that I must leave without knowing the entire experience.

But I am the last. The others have gone. *The stars move still, time runs, and the clock will strike . . .*

The ovation is enormous. The resurrected Jocasta bows beside her red—socketted king, smiling. Hand in hand, they dine upon our applause—but even pale Tiresias does not see what I have seen. It is very unfortunate.

And now the taxi home. What time is it in Thebes?

. . . . . .

DEVERS is mixing us a strong drink, which he generally does not do. I shall appreciate these final moments all the more, seen through the prism of his soaring fancy.

His mood is a strange one. It is almost as if he knows what is to occur at one o'clock—almost as if he knows what will happen when the atom expands its fleecy chest, shouldering aside an army of Titans, and the Mediterranean rushes to dip its wine-dark muzzle into the vacant Sahara.

But he could not know, without knowing me, and this time he will be a character, not an observer, when the thing of terrible beauty occurs.

We both watch the pale gray eyes on the sliding panel. He takes aspirins in advance when he drinks, which means he will be mixing us more.

But his hand . . . It stops short of the medicine chest.

Framed in tile and stainless steel, we both regard reflections of a stranger.

"Good evening."

After ten years, those two words, and on the eve of the last performance!

Activating his voice to reply would be rather silly, even if I could manage it, and it would doubtless be upsetting.

I waited, and so did he.

Finally, like an organ player, I pedalled and chorded the necessary synapses:

Good evening. Please go ahead and take your aspirins.

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He did. Then he picked up his drink from the ledge.

"I hope you enjoy Martinis."

I do. Very much. Please drink more.

He smirked at us and returned to the living room.

"What are you? A psychosis? A dybbuk?"

Oh, no! Nothing like that!—Just a member of the audience.

"I don't recall selling you a ticket."

You did not exactly invite me, but I didn't think you would mind, if I kept quiet. . . . .

"Very decent of you."

He mixed another drink, then looked out at the building across the way. It had two lighted windows, on different floors, like misplaced eyes.

"Mind if I ask why?"

Not at all. Perhaps you can even help me. I am an itinerant esthetician. I have to borrow bodies on the worlds I visit—preferably those of beings with similar interests.

"I see—you're a gate-crasher."

Sort of, I guess. I try not to cause any trouble, though. Generally, my host never even learns of my existence. But I have to leave soon, and something has been troubling me for the past several years . . . Since you have guessed at my existence and managed to maintain your stability, I've decided to ask you to resolve it.

"Ask away." He was suddenly bitter and very offended. I saw the reason in an instant.

Do not think, I told him, *that I have influenced anything you have thought or done. I am only an observer. My sole function is to appreciate beauty.*

"How interesting!" he sneered. "How soon is it going to happen?"

What?

"The thing that is causing you to leave."

Oh, that . . .

I was not certain what to tell him. What could he do, anyhow? Suffer a little harder, perhaps.

"Well?"

My time is up, I told him.

"I see flashes," he said. "Sand and smoke, and a flaming baseball."

He was too sensitive. I thought I had covered those thoughts.

Well . . The world is going to end at one o'clock . . .

"That's good to know. How?"

There is a substratum of fissionable material, which Project Eden is going to detonate. This will produce an enormous chain reaction . . .

"Can't you do something to stop it?"

I don't know how. I don't know what could stop it. My knowledge is limited to the arts and the life-sciences. —You broke your leg when you were skiing in Ver-

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mont last winter. You never knew. Things like that, I can manage . . .

"And the horn blows at midnight," he observed.

One o'clock, I corrected, *Eastern Standard Time.*

"Might as well have another drink," he said, looking at his watch. "It's going on twelve."

My question . . . I cleared an imaginary throat.

"Oh yes, what did you want to know?"

—The other half of the tragic response. I've watched you go through it many times, but I can't get at it. I feel the terror part, but the pity—the pity always eludes me.

ANYONE can be afraid," he said, "that part is easy. But you have to be able to get inside people—not exactly the way you do—and feel everything they feel, just before they go smash—so that it feels you're going smash along with them—and you can't do a damn thing about it, and you wish you could—that's pity."

Oh? And being afraid, too?

"—and being afraid. Together, they equal the grand catharsis of true tragedy."

He hiccupped.

And the tragic figure, for whom you feel these things? He must be great and noble, mustn't he?

"True," he nodded, as though I were seated across the room from him, "and in the last moment, when the unalterable jungle law is about to prevail, he must stare into the faceless mask of God, and bear himself, for that brief moment, above the pleas of his nature and the course of events."

We both looked at his watch.

"What time will you be leaving?"

In about fifteen minutes.

"Good. You have time to listen to a record while I dress."

He switched on his stereo, and selected an album.

I shifted uneasily.

If it isn't too long. . . .

He regarded the jacket.

"Five minutes and eight seconds. I've always maintained that it is music for the last hour of Earth."

He placed it on the turntable and set the arm.

"If Gabriel doesn't show up, this will do."

He reached for his tie as the first notes of Miles Davis' *Saeta* limped through the room, like a wounded thing climbing a hill.

He hummed along with it as he reknotted his tie and combed his hair. Davis talked through an Easter lily with a tongue of brass, and the procession moved before us: Oedipus and blind Gloucester stumbled by, led by Antigone and Edgar—Prince Hamlet gave a

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fencer's salute and plunged forward, while black Othello lumbered on behind—Hippolytus, all in white, and the Duchess of Malfi, sad, paraded through memory on a thousand stages.

Phillip buttoned his jacket as the final notes sounded, and shut down the player. Carefully rejacketting the record, he placed it among his others.

What are you going to do?

"Say good-bye. There's a party up the street I hadn't planned on attending. I believe I'll stop in for a drink. Good-bye to you also.

"By the way," he asked, "What is your name? I've known you for a long time, I ought to call you something now."

He suggested one, half-conconsciously. I had never really had a name before, so I took it.

Adrastea, I told him.

He smirked again.

"No thought is safe from you, is it? Good-bye."

Good-bye.

He closed the door behind him, and I passed through the ceilings and floors of the apartments overhead, then up, and into the night above the city. One eye in the building across the street winked out; as I watched, the other did the same.

Bodiless again, I fled upwards, wishing there was something I could feel.

THE END

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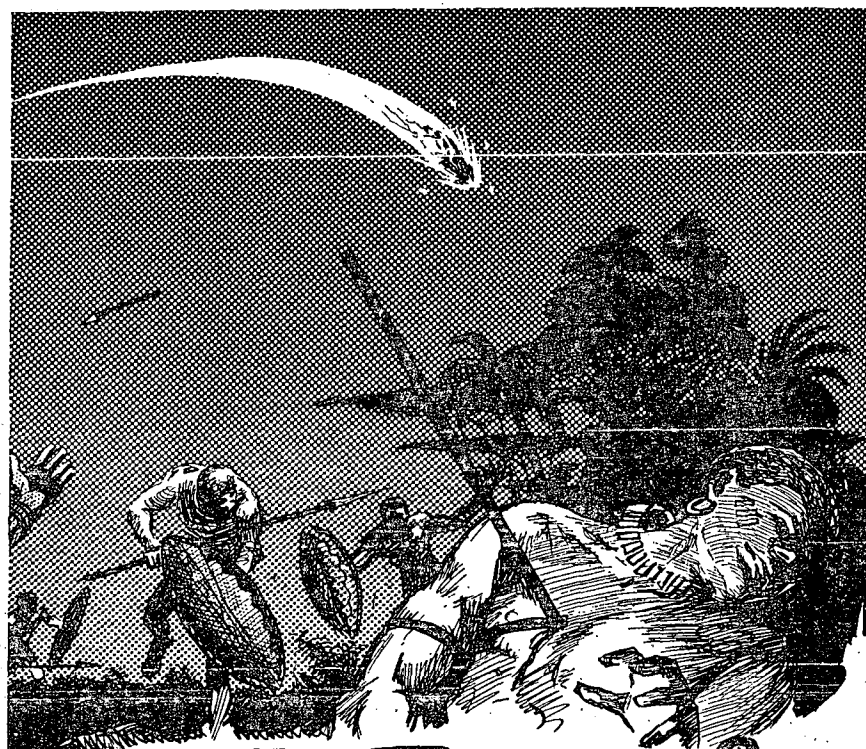

RAIN MAGIC

By ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

Illustrator ADKINS

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The editors of **ARGOSY** *considered this story so remarkable that they inquired about its source. Mr. Gardner's reply was published in the letter section of the issue containing the story. We reprint it here as an interesting and pertinent introduction to the novelet.*

IS "Rain Magic" fact or fiction? I wish I knew.

Some of it is fiction, I know, because I invented connecting incidents and wove them into the yarn. It's the rest of it that haunts me. At the time I thought it was just a wild lie of an old desert rat. And then I came to believe it was true.

Anyhow, here are the facts, and the reader can judge for himself.

About six months ago I went stale on Western stories. My characters became fuzzy in my mind; my descriptions lacked that intangible something that makes a story pack a punch. I knew I had to get out and gather new material.

So I got a camp wagon. It's a truck containing a complete living outfit—bed, bath, hot and cold water, radio, writing desk, closet, stove, et cetera. I struck out into the trackless desert, following old, abandoned roads, sometimes making my own roads. I was writing as I went, meeting old prospectors, putting them on paper, getting steeped in the desert environment.

February 13, found me at a little spring in the middle of barren desert. As far as I knew there wasn't a soul within miles.

Then I heard steps, the sound of a voice. I got up from my typewriter, went to the door. There was an old prospector getting water at the spring. But he wasn't the typical desert rat. I am always interested in character classification, and the man puzzled me. I came to the conclusion he'd been a sailor.

So I got out, shook hands, and passed the time of day. He was interested in my camp wagon, and I took him in, sat him down and smoked for a spell. Then I asked him if he hadn't been a sailor.

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I can still see the queer pucker that came into his eyes as he nodded.

Now sailors are pretty much inclined to stay with the water. One doesn't often find a typical sailor in the desert. So I asked him why he'd come into the desert.

He explained that he had to get away from rain. When it rained he got the sleeping sickness.

That sounded like a story, so I made it a point to draw him out. It came, a bit at a time, starting with the Sahara dust that painted the rigging of the ship after the storm, and winding up with the sleeping sickness that came back whenever he smelled the damp of rain-soaked vegetation.

I thought it was one gosh-awful lie, but it was a gripping, entertaining lie, and I thought I could use it. I put it up to him as a business proposition, and within a few minutes held in my possession a document which read in part as follows:

> *For value received, I hereby sell to Erle Stanley Gardner the story rights covering my adventures in Africa, including the monkey-man, the unwritten language, the ants who watched the gold ledge, the bread that made me ill, the sleeping sickness which comes back every spring and leaves me with memories of my lost sweetheart, et cetera, et cetera.*

After that I set about taking complete notes of his story. I still thought it was a lie, an awful lie.

Like all stories of real life in the raw it lacked certain connecting incidents. There was no balance to it. It seemed disconnected in places.

Because I intended to make a pure fiction story out of it, I didn't hesitate to fill in these connections. I tried to give it a sweep of unified action, and I took some liberties with the facts as he had given them to me. Yet, in the main, I kept his highlights, and I was faithful to the backgrounds as he had described them.

Because he had just recovered from a recurrence of the sleeping sickness, I started the story as it would have been told to a man who had stumbled onto the sleeping form in the desert. It was a story that "wrote itself." The words just poured from my fingertips to the typewriter. But I was writing it as fiction, and I considered it as such.

Not all of what he told me went into the story. There was some that dealt with intimate matters one doesn't print. There was some that dealt with tribal customs, markings of different tribes, et cetera, et cetera. In

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fact, I rather avoided some of these definite facts. Because I felt the whole thing was fiction, I was rather careful to keep from setting down definite data, using only such as seemed necessary.

Then, after the story had been written and mailed, after I had returned to headquarters, I chanced to get some books dealing with the locality covered in the story, telling of tribal characteristics, racial markings, et cetera.

To my surprise, I found that every fact given me by the old prospector was true. I became convinced that his story was, at least, founded on fact.

And so I consider "Rain Magic" the most remarkable story I ever had anything to do with. I'm sorry I colored it up with fiction of my own invention. I wish I'd left it as it was, regardless of lack of connective incident and consistent motivation.

Somewhere in the shifting sands of the California desert is an old prospector, hiding from the rain, digging for gold, cherishing lost memories. His sun-puckered eyes have seen sights that few men have seen. His life has been a tragedy so weird, so bizarre that it challenges credulity. Yet of him it can be said, "He has lived."

ERLE STANLEY GARDNER.

CHAPTER 1

Through The Breakers

NO, no—no more coffee. Thanks. Been asleep, eh? Well, don't look so worried about it. Mighty nice of you to wake me up. What day is it?

Thursday, eh? I've been asleep two days then—oh, it is? Then it's been nine days. That's more like it. It was the rain, you see. I tried to get back to my tent, but the storm came up too fast. It's the smell of the damp green things in a rain. The doctors tell me it's auto-hypnosis. They're wrong. M'Camba told me I'd always be that way when I smelled the jungle smell. It's the sleeping sickness in my veins. That's why I came to the desert. It doesn't rain out here more than once or twice a year.

When it does rain the jungle smells come back and the sleeping sickness gets me. Funny how my memory comes back after those long sleeps. It was the drugged bread, *king-kee* they called it; but the language ain't never been written down. Sort of a graduated monkey talk it was.

It's hot here, come over in the shadow of this Joshuay palm. That's better.

Ever been to sea? No? Then you won't understand.

IT was down off the coast of Africa. Anything can happen off the coast of Africa. After the

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storms, the Sahara dust comes and paints the rigging white. Yes, sir, three hundred miles out to sea I've seen it. And for a hundred miles you can get the smell of the jungles. When the wind's right.

It was an awful gale. You don't see 'em like it very often. We tried to let go the deckload of lumber, but the chains jammed. The Dutchmen took to the riggin' jabberin' prayers. They were a weak-kneed lot. It was the Irishman that stayed with it. He was a cursin' devil.

He got busy with an ax. The load had listed and we was heeled over to port. The Dutchmen in the riggin' prayin', an' the Irishman down on the lumber cursin'. A wave took him over and then another wave washed him back again. I seen it with my own eyes. He didn't give up. He just cursed harder than ever. And he got the chains loose, too. The deck load slid off and she righted.

But it was heavy weather and it got worse. The sky was just a mass of whirlin' wind and the water came over until she didn't get rid of one wave before the next bunch of green water was on top of her.

The rudder carried away. I thought everything was gone, but she lived through it. We got blown in, almost on top of the shore. When the gale died we could see it. There was a species of palm stickin' up against the sky, tall trees they were, and below 'em was a solid mass of green stuff, and it stunk. The whole thing was decayin' an' steamin' just like the inside of a rotten, damp log.

The old man was a bad one. It was a hell ship an' no mistake. I'd been shanghaied, an' I wanted back. Thirty pound I had in my pocket when I felt the drink rockin' my head. I knew then, but it was too late. The last I remembered was the grinnin' face of the tout smilin' at me through a blue haze.

The grub was rotten. The old man was a devil when he was sober, an' worse when he was drunk. The Irish mate cursed all the time, cursed and worked. Between 'em they drove the men, drove us like sheep.

The moon was half full. After the storm the waves were rollin' in on a good sea breeze. There wasn't any whitecaps. The wind just piled the water up until the breakers stood fourteen feet high before they curled an' raced up the beach.

But the breakers didn't look so bad from the deck of the ship. Not in the light of the half moon they didn't. We'd been at work on the rudder an' there was a raft over the side. I was on watch, an' the old man was drunk, awful drunk. I don't know when the idea came to me, but it seemed to

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have always been there. It just popped out in front when it got a chance.

I WAS halfway down the rope before I really knew what I was doin'. My bare feet hit the raft an' my sailor knife was workin' on the rope before I had a chance to even think things over.

But I had a chance on the road in, riding the breakers. I had a chance even as soon as the rope was cut. The old man came and stood on the rail, lookin' at the weather, too drunk to know what he was looking at, but cockin' his bleary eye at the sky outa habit.

He'd have seen me, drunk as he was, if he'd looked down, but he didn't. If he'd caught me then I'd have been flayed alive. He'd have sobered up just special for the occasion.

I drifted away from him. The moon was on the other side of the hull, leavin' it just a big, black blotch o' shadow, ripplin' on the water, heavin' up into the sky. Then I drifted out of the shadow and into golden water. The moon showed over the top of the boat, an' the sharks got busy.

I'd heard they never struck at a man while he was strugglin'. Maybe it's true. I kept movin', hands and feet goin'. The raft was only an inch or two outa water, an' it was narrow. The sharks cut through the water like hissin' shadows. I was afraid one of 'em would grab a hand or a foot an' drag me down, but they didn't. I could keep the rest of me outa the water, but not my hands an' feet. I had to paddle with 'em to get into shore before the wind and tide changed. I sure didn't want to be left floatin' around there with no sail, nor food; nothin' but sharks.

From the ship the breakers looked easy an' lazylike. When I got in closer I saw they were monsters. They'd rise up an' blot out all the land, even the tops of the high trees. Just before they'd break they'd send streamers of spray, high up in the heavens. Then they'd come down with a crash.

But I couldn't turn back. The sharks and the wind and the tide were all against me, and the old man would have killed me.

I rode in on a couple of breakers, and then the third one broke behind me. The raft an' me, an' maybe the sharks all got mixed up together. My feet struck the sand, but they wouldn't stay there.

The strong undertow was cuttin' the sand out from under me. I could feel it racin' along over my toes, an' then I started back an' down.

The undertow sucked me under another wave, somethin' alive brushed against my back, an' then tons o' water came down

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over me. That time I was on the bottom an' I rolled along with sand an' water bein' pumped into my innards. I thought it was the end, but there was a lull in the big ones, an' a couple o' little ones came an' rolled me up on the beach.

I WAS more dead than alive. The water had made me groggy, an' I was sore from the pummelin' I'd got. I staggered up the strip of sand an' into the jungle.

A little ways back was a cave, an' into the cave I flopped. The water oozed out of my insides like from a soaked sponge. My lungs an' stomach an' ears were all full. I tried to get over a log an' let 'er drain out, but I was too weak. I felt everything turnin' black to me.

The next thing I knew it was gettin' dawn an' shadowy shapes were flittin' around. I thought they was black angels an' they were goin' to smother me. They stunk with a musty smell, an' they settled all over me.

Then I could feel the blood runnin' over my skin. It got a little lighter, an' I could see. I was in a bat cave an' the bats were comin' back. They'd found me an' were settlin' on me in clouds, suckin' blood.

I tried to fight 'em off, but it was like fightin' a fog. Sometimes I'd hit 'em, but they'd just sail through the air, an' I couldn't hurt 'em. All the time, they was flutterin' their wings an' lookin' for a chance to get more blood.

I'd got the weight of 'em off, though, an' I staggered out of the cave. They followed me for a ways; but when I got out to where it was gettin' light they went back in the cave. It gets light quick down there in the tropics, an' the light hurt their eyes.

I rolled into the sand an' went to sleep.

When I woke up I heard marchin' feet. It sounded like an army. They was comin' regular like, slow, unhurried, deliberate. It made the chills come up my spine just to hear the *boom, boom, boom* of those feet.

I crawled deeper into the sand under the shadows of the overhangin' green stuff. Naked men an' women filed out onto the beach.

I watched 'em.

Chocolate-colored they were, an' they talked a funny, squeaky talk. I found afterward some of the words was Fanti and some was a graduated monkey talk. Fanti ain't never been written down.

It's one of the Tshi languages. The Ashantis an' the Fantis an' one or two other tribes speak branches o' the same lingo. But these people spoke part Fanti an' part graduated monkey talk.

An' among 'em was a monkey-

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man. He was a funny guy. There was coarse hair all over him, an' he had a stub of a tail. His big toes weren't set like mine, but they was twisted like a foot thumb.

No, I didn't notice the toes at the time. I found that out later, while he was sittin' on a limb gettin' ready to shoot a poisoned arrow at me. I thought every minute was my last, an' then was when I noticed the way his foot thumbs wrapped around the limb. Funny how a man will notice little things when he's near death.

Anyway, this tribe came down an' marched into the water, men, women, an' children. They washed themselves up to the hips, sort of formal, like it was a ceremony. The rest of them they didn't get water on at all. They came out an' rubbed sort of an oil on their arms, chests, an' faces.

CHAPTER 2
Life Or Death

FINALLY they all went away, all except a woman an' a little kid. The woman was lookin' for somethin' in the water—fish, maybe. The kid was on a rock about eight feet away, a little shaver he was, an' he had a funny pot-belly. I looked at him an' I looked at her.

I was sick an' I was hungry, an' I was bleedin' from the bats. The smell of the jungle was in my lungs, so I couldn't tell whether the air was full of jungle or whether I was breathin' in jungle stuff with just a little air. It's a queer sensation. Unless you've been through it you wouldn't understand.

Well, I felt it was everything or nothin'. The woman couldn't kill me, an' the kid couldn't. An' I had to make myself known an' get somethin' to eat.

I straightened out of the sand.

"Hello," said I.

The kid was squattin' on his haunches. He didn't seem to jump. He just flew through the air an' he sailed right onto his mother's back. His hands clung to her shoulders an' his head pressed tight against her skin, the eyes rollin' at me, but the head never movin'.

The mother made three jumps right up the sand, an' then she sailed into the air an' caught the branch of a tree. The green stuff was so thick that I lost sight of 'em both right there. I could hear a lot of jabberin' monkey talk in the trees, an' then I heard the squeaky voice of the woman talkin' back to the monkeys. I could tell the way she was goin' by the jabber of monkey talk.

No, I can't remember words of monkey talk. I never got so I could talk to the monkeys. But the people did. I am goin' to tell you about that. I'm explainin'

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about the sleepin' sickness, an' about how the memories come back to me after I've been asleep.

Maybe they're dreams, but maybe they ain't. If they're dreams, how comes it that when I got to Cape Coast Castle I couldn't remember where I'd been? They brought me in there on stretchers, an' nobody knows how far they'd brought me. They left me in the dead o' night. But the next mornin' there were the tracks, an' they were tracks like nobody there had ever seen before.

There's strange things in Africa, an' this was when I was a young blood, remember that. I was an upstandin' youngster, too. I'd tackle anything, even the west coast of Africa on a raft, an' the Fanti warriors; but I'm comin' to that directly.

WELL, the woman ran away, an' the monkeys came. They stuck around on the trees an' jabbered monkey talk at me. I wished I'd been like the woman an' could have talked to 'em. But the monkeys ain't got so many words. There's a lot of it that's just tone stuff. It was the ants that could speak, but they rubbed feelers together.

Oh, yes, there was ants, great, woolly ants two inches long, ants that built houses out of sticks. They built 'em thirty feet high, an' some of the sticks was half an inch round an' six or eight inches long. They had the ants guardin' the gold ledge, an' nobody except Kk-Kk, the feeder, an' the goldsmith could come near there.

The goldsmith was nothin' but a slave, anyway. They'd captured him from a slaver that went ashore. The others died of the fever, but the natives gave the goldsmith some medicine that cured him. After that he couldn't get sick. They could have done the same by me, too, but the monkey-man was my enemy. He wanted Kk-Kk for himself.

Finally I heard the tramp of feet again, an' the warriors of the tribe came out. They had spears an' little bows with long arrows. The arrows were as thin as a pencil. They didn't look like they'd hurt anything, but there was a funny color on the points, a sort of shimmering something.

I found out afterward that was where they'd coated 'em with poison an' baked the poison into the wood. One scratch with an arrow like that an' a man or a beast would die. But it didn't hurt the flesh none for eatin'. Either of man or beast it didn't. They ate 'em both.

I SAW it was up to me to make a speech. The men all looked serious an' dignified. That is, they all did except the monkey-

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man. He capered around on the outside. His balance didn't seem good on his two feet, so he'd stoop over an' use the backs of his knuckles to steady himself. He could hitch along over the ground like the wind. His arms were long, long an' hairy, an' the inside of his palms was all wrinkled, thick an' black.

Anyhow, I made a speech.

I told 'em that I was awful tough, an' that I was thin, an' maybe the bat bites had poisoned me, so I wouldn't advise 'em to cook me. I told 'em I was a friend an' I didn't come to bother 'em, but to get away from the big ship that was layin' offshore.

I thought they understood me, because some of 'em was lookin' at the ship. But I found out afterward they didn't. They'd seen the ship, an' they'd seen me, an' they saw the dried salt water on my clothes, an' they figgered it out for themselves.

I finished with my speech. I didn't expect 'em to clap their hands, because they had spears an' bows, but I thought maybe they'd smile. They was a funny bunch, all gathered around there in a circle, grave an' naked like. An' they all had three scars on each side of their cheek bones. It made 'em look tough.

THEN the monkey-man gave a sort of a leap an' lit in the trees, an' the monkeys came around and jabbered, an' he jabbered, an' somehow I thought he was tellin' the monkeys about me. Maybe he was.

An' then from the jungle behind me I heard a girl's voice, an' it was speakin' good English.

"Be silent and I shall speak to my father," she said.

You can imagine how I felt hearin' an English voice from the jungle that way, an' knowin' it was a girl's voice. But I knew she wasn't a white woman. I could tell that by the sound of the voice, sort of the way the tongue didn't click against the roof of the mouth, but the lips made the speech soft like.

An' then there was a lot of squeaky talk from the jungles.

There was silence after that talk, an' then I heard the girl's voice again.

"They've gone for the goldsmith. He'll talk to you."

I didn't see who had gone, an' I didn't know who the goldsmith was. I turned around an' tried to see into the jungle, but all I could see was leaves, trunks an' vine stems. There was a wispy blue vapor that settled all around an' overhead the air was white way way up, white with Sahara dust. But down low the jungle odor hung around the ground. Around me the circle stood naked an' silent. Not a man moved.

Who was the goldsmith?—I wondered. Who was the girl?

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Then I heard steps behind me an' the jungle parted. I smelled somethin' burnin'. It wasn't tobacco, not the kind we have, but it was a sort of a tobacco flavor.

A man came out into the circle, smokin' a pipe.

"How are yuh?" he says, an' sticks forward a hand.

HE was a white man, part white anyway, an' he had on some funny clothes. They were made of skins, but they were cut like a tailor would cut 'em. He even had a skin hat with a stiff brim. He'd made the stiff brim out of green skin with the hair rubbed off.

He was smokin' a clay pipe, an' there was a vacant look in his eyes, a blank somethin' like a man who didn't have feelin's any more, but was just a man-machine.

I shook hands with him.

"Are they goin' to eat me?" I asks.

He smoked awhile before he spoke, an' then he takes the pipe out of his mouth an' nods his head.

"Sure," he says.

It wasn't encouragin'.

"Have hope," came the voice from the jungle, the voice of the girl. She seemed to be standin' close, close an' keepin' in one place, but I couldn't see her.

I talked to the man with the pipe. I made him a speech. He turned around and talked to the circle of men, an' they didn't say anything.

Finally an old man grunted, an' like the grunt was an order they all squatted down on their haunches, all of 'em facin' me.

Then the girl in the jungle made squeaky noises. The old man seemed to be listenin' to her. The others didn't listen to anything. They were just starin' at me, an' the expression on all of the faces was the same. It was sort of a curiosity, but it wasn't a curiosity to see what I looked like. I felt it was a curiosity to see what I'd taste like.

Then the goldsmith rubbed some more brown leaf into the pipe, right on top of the coals of the other pipeful.

"The girl is claimin' you as a slave," he says.

"Who is the girl?" I asked him.

"Kk-Kk," he says, an' I didn't know whether he was givin' me a name or warning' me to keep quiet.

Well, I figured I'd rather be a slave than a meal, so I kept quiet.

Then the monkey man in the tree began to jabber.

They didn't look up at him, but I could see they were listenin'. When he got done the girl squeaked some more words.

Then the monkey-man made some more talk, and the girl talked. The fellow with the pipe smoked an' blew the smoke out

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of his nose. His eyes were weary an' puckered. He was an odd fellow.

Finally the old man that had grunted an' made 'em squat, gave another grunt. They all stood up.

This is the show-down, I says to myself. It's either bein' a white slave or bein' a meat loaf.

The old man looked at me an' blinked. Then he sucked his lips into his mouth until his face was all puckered into wrinkles. He blinked his lidless eyes some more an' then grunted twice. Then all the men marched off. I could hear their feet boomin' along the hard ground in the jungle, on a path that had been beaten down hard by millions of bare feet. I found out afterward that same path had been used for over a hundred years, an' the king made a law it had to be traveled every day. That was the only way they could keep the ground hard.

I guess I'm a meal, I thought to myself. I figgered the goldsmith would have told me if I had been goin' to be a slave. But he'd moved off with the rest, an' he hadn't said a word.

THE monkey-man kept talkin' to the bunch. He didn't walk along the path, but he moved through the trees, keepin' up in the branches, right over the heads of the others, an' talkin' all the time, an' his words didn't seem happy words. I sort of felt he was scoldin' like a monkey that's watchin' yuh eat a coconut.

But the old man grunted at him, an' he shut up like a clam. He was mad, though. I could tell that because he set off through the trees, tearin' after a couple of monkeys. An' he pretty nearly caught 'em. They sounded like a whirlwind, tearin' through the branches. Then the sounds got fainter, an' finally everything was still.

I looked around. There was nobody in sight. I was there, on the fringe of beach, right near the edge of the jungle, and everything was still an' silent.

Then there came a rustlin' of the jungle stuff an' she came out.

She had on a skirt of grass stuff, an' her eyes were funny. a liquid expression.

Her eyes were like that.

"I'm Kk-Kk the daughter of Yik-Yik, and the keeper of the gold ledge," she said. "I have learned to speak the language of the goldsmith. You, too, speak the same language. You are my slave."

"Thank God I ain't a meal," I said. That was before the doctor guys discovered these here calories in food; but right then I didn't feel like a half a good-sized calory, much less a fit meal for a native warrior.

"You will be my slave," she said, "but if you pay skins to

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my father you can buy your freedom, and then you will be a warrior."

"I ain't never been a slave to a woman," I told her, me bein' one of the kind that had always kept from being led to the altar, "but I'd rather be a slave to you than to that old man on the boat out yonder."

There was something half shy about her, and yet something proud and dignified.

"I have promised my father my share of the next hunt in order to purchase you from the tribe," she went on.

"Thanks," I told her, knowin' it was up to me to say somethin', but sort of wonderin' whether a free, white man should thank a woman who had made a slave outa him.

"Come," she said, an' turned away.

I had more of a chance to study her back. She was lithe, graceful, and she was a well-turned lass. There was a set to her head, a funny little twist of her shoulders when she walked that showed she was royalty and knowed it. Funny how people get that little touch of class no matter where they are or what stock. Just as soon as they get royal blood in 'em they get it. I've seen 'em everywhere.

I followed her into the jungle, down under the branches where there wasn't sunlight any more; but the day was just filled with green light.

Finally we came through the jungle an' into a big clearin'. There were huts around the clearin' an' a big fire. The people of the tribe were here, goin' about their business in knots of two an' three just like nothin' had happened. I was a member of the tribe now, the slave of Kk-Kk.

Most of the women stared, an' the kids scampered away when they seen me look toward 'em; but that was all. The men took me for granted.

CHAPTER 3
Guardians Of Gold

THE girl took me to a hut. In one corner was a frame of wood with animal skins stretched over it. There were all kinds of skins. Some of 'em I knew, more of 'em I didn't.

She squeaked out some words an' then there was some more jabberin' in a quaverin' voice, an' an old woman came an' brought me fruits.

I squatted down on my heels the way the natives did, an' tried to eat the fruit. My stomach was still pretty full of salt water an' sand, but the fruit tasted good. Then they gave me a half a coconut shell filled with some sort of creamy liquid that had bubbles comin' up in it. It tasted sort of sour, but it had a lot of author-

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ity. Ten minutes after I drank it I felt my neck snap back. It was the delayed kick, an' it was like the hind leg of a mule.

"Come," says the jane, an' led the way again out into the openin'.

I followed her, across the openin' into the jungle, along a path, past the shore of a lagoon, and up into a little cañon. Here the trees were thicker than ever except on the walls of the cañon itself. There'd been a few dirt slides in that cañon, an' in one or two places the rock had been stripped bare. After a ways it was all rock.

An' then we came to somethin' that made my eyes stick out. There was a ledge o' rock an' a vein o' quartz in it. The vein was just shot with gold, an' in the center it was almost pure gold. The quartz was crumbly, an' there were pieces of it scattered around on the ground. The foliage had been cleared away, an' the ground was hard. There was a fire goin' near the ledge an' some clay crucibles were there. Then there was a great bellows affair made out of thick, oiled leather. It was a big thing, but all the air came out of a little piece of hollow wood in the front.

I picked up one of the pieces of quartz. The rock could be crumbled between the fingers, an' it left the gold in my hand. The gold was just like it showed in the rock, spreadin' out to form sort of a tree. There must have been fifty dollars' worth in the piece o' rock that I crumbled up in my fingers.

I MOVED my hands around fast an' managed to slip the gold in my torn shirt. The girl was watchin' me with those funny, liquid eyes of hers, but she didn't say a word.

There was a great big pile of small sticks between me an' the ledge of gold. I figured it was kindlin' wood that they kept for the fire. But finally my eyes got loose from the ledge of gold an' what should I see but the sticks movin'. I looked again, an' then I saw somethin' else.

It was a big ant heap made outa sticks an' sawdust. Some of those sticks were eight or ten inches long and half an inch around. And the whole place was swarming with ants. They had their heads stickin' out of the little holes between the sticks.

They must be big ants, I thought; but I was interested in that gold ledge. There must have been millions of dollars in it. I took a couple of steps toward it, an' then the ant heap just swarmed with life.

They were big ants covered with sort of a white wool and they came out of there like somebody had given 'em an order.

The girl shrieked somethin' in

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a high-pitched voice, but I didn't know whether it was at me or the ants.

The ants swarmed into two columns of maybe eight or ten abreast in each column, an' they started for me, swingin' out in a big circle as though one was goin' to come on one side, an' one on the other.

An' then they stopped. The girl ran forward an' put her arms on my shoulders an' started caressin' me, pattin' my hair, cooin' soft noises in my ears.

I thought maybe she'd gone cuckoo, an' I looked into her eyes, but they weren't lookin' at me, they were lookin' at the ants, an' they were wide with fear.

AN' the ants were lookin' at her. I could see their big eyes gazin' steadylike at her. Then somethin' else must have been said to 'em, although I did not hear anything. But all at once, just like an army presentin' arms in response to an order, they threw up their long feelers an' waved 'em gently back an' forth. Then the girl took me by the arm an' moved me away.

"I should have told you," she said, "never to go past the line of that path. The ants guard the yellow metal, and when one comes nearer than that they attack. There is no escape from those ants. I took you to them so now you can help me feed them."

That all sounded sorta cuckoo to me, but the whole business was cuckoo anyway.

"Look here," I tells this jane. "I'm willin' to be the slave of a chief's daughter—for awhile. But I ain't goin' to be slave to no ant hill."

"That is not expected," she said. "It is an honor to assist in feeding the ants, a sacred right. You only assist me. Never again must you come so near to the ants."

I did a lot of thinkin'. I wasn't hankerin' to come into an argument with those ants, but I was figurin' to take a closer slant at that gold ledge.

She took me away into the jungle where there was a pile of fruit dryin' in the sun. It was a funny sort of fruit, an' smelled sweet, like orange blossoms, only there was more of a honey smell to it.

"Take your arms full," she said.

Well, it was my first experience bein' a slave, but I couldn't see as it was much different from bein' a sailor, only the work was easier.

I scooped up both arms full of the stuff. The smell made me a little dizzy at first, but I soon got used to it. The girl picked up some, too, an' she led the way back to the ant pile.

She had me put my load down an' showed me how to arrange

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it in a long semicircle. I could see the ants watchin' from out of the holes in the ant pile, but they did not do anything except watch.

Finally the girl made a queer clicking sound with her tongue an' teeth an' the ants commenced to boil out again. This time they made for the fruit, an' they went in order, just like a bunch of swell passengers on one of the big ocean liners. Some of 'em seemed to hold first meal ticket while the others remained on guard. Then there must have been some signal from the ants, because the girl didn't say a word, but all of the first bunch of ants fell back an' stood guard, an' the second bunch of ants moved forward.

They repeated that a couple of times. I watched 'em, too fascinated to say a word.

After awhile I heard steps, an' the old goldsmith came along, puffin' his pipe regular, a puff for every two steps. He reminded me of a freight engine, boilin' along on a down grade, hittin' her up regular.

He didn't say a word to me, nor to the ants, but the ants heard him comin' an' they all formed into two lanes with their feelers wavin', an' the goldsmith walked down between those lanes an' up to the gold ledge. There he stuck some more wood on the fire, raked away some ashes an' pawed out a bed of coals.

THEN I saw he had a hammer an' a piece of metal that looked like a reddish iron. He pulled a skin away an' I saw lots of lumps an' stringers of pure gold. It was a yellow, frosty lookin' sort of gold, and it was so pure it glistened.

He picked up some of the pieces an' commenced to hammer 'em into ornaments.

"What do yuh do with that stuff?" I asked the girl, wavin' my hand careless like so she wouldn't think I was much interested.

"We trade it to the Fanti tribes," she said. "It is of no use, too soft to make weapons, too heavy for arrow points; but they use it to wear around their fingers and ankles. They give us many skins for it, and sometimes they try to capture our territory and take the entire ledge. If I had my way we would stop making the ornaments. Our people do not like the metal, and never use it. Having it here just makes trouble for us, and the Fantis are fierce people. They are killing off our entire tribe."

I nodded as wise as a dozen owls on a limb.

"Yeah," I told her, "the stuff always makes trouble. Seems to me it'd be better to get rid of it."

The old goldsmith raised his head, twisted his pipe in his mouth and screwed his rheumy eyes at me. For a minute or two

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he acted like he was goin' to say somethin', an' then he went back to his work.

It was a close call. Right then I knew I'd been goin' too fast. But I had my eye on that ledge o' gold.

I guess it was a Fanti that saved my life; if it hadn't been for seein' him, the ants would have got me sure. Those ants looked pretty fierce when I saw 'em boilin' out in military formation, but by the time it came dark they didn't seem so much.

I got to thinkin' things over. Bein' a slave wasn't near so bad as it might be, an' one of these days I was goin' to get away in the jungle an' work down to a port. All I needed was to have about ninety pounds o' pure gold on my back when I went out an' I wouldn't be workin' as a sailor no more.

Sittin' there in the warm night, while the other folks had all rolled into their huts, I got to thinkin' things over. As a slave, I wasn't given a hut. I could sleep out. If the animals got bad I could either build up the fire or climb a tree. But there was fifty or sixty other slaves, mostly captured warriors of other tribes, an' it wasn't so bad.

There was a place in the jungle where the hills formed a bottle neck, an' there the tribe kept sentries so the Fantis couldn't get in, an' so the slaves couldn't get out. Gettin' through the jungle where there wasn't a trail was plain impossible.

I picked up a lot of this from the girl, an' a lot from usin' my eyes.

NIGHT time the ants didn't seem so much, an' the gold seemed a lot more. I wondered how I could work it, an' then a scheme hit me. I'd go out an' make a quick run for the ledge, chop off a few chunks o' quartz an' then beat it back quick. I'd be in an' out before the ants could come boilin' out of their thirty-foot ant hill. It seemed a cinch.

I sneaked away an' managed to find my way down the trail to the gold ledge. It was dark in the jungle. The stars were all misty, an' a squall was workin' somewheres out to sea. I could hear the thunder of the surf an' smell the smells of the jungle. There wasn't any noise outside of the poundin' surf.

I'd taken my shoes off when I dropped onto the raft, an' they'd got lost while I was rollin' around in the water, so I was barefoot. The ground had been beaten hard by millions of bare feet, an' so I made no noise. The hard part was tellin' just when I got to the gold ledge, because I didn't want to steer a wrong course an' fetch up against the ant heap.

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I needn't have worried. I smelled the faint smell o' smoke, an' then a pile o' coals gleamed red against the black of the jungle night. It was the coals of the goldsmith's fire. I chuckled to myself. What a simple bunch o' people this tribe was!

An' then, all of a sudden, I knew someone else was there in the jungle. It was that funny feelin' that a man can't describe. It wasn't a sound, because there wasn't any sound. It wasn't anything I could see, because it was as dark as the inside of a pocket. But it was somethin' that just made my hair bristle.

I slipped back from the path and into the dark of the jungle. Six feet from the trail an' I was hidden as well as though I'd been buried.

I got my eye up against a crack in the leaves an' watched the coals of the camp fire, tryin' to see if anything moved.

ALL of a sudden those coals just blotted out. I thought maybe a leaf or a vine had got in front of my eyes, but there wasn't. It was just somethin' movin' between me an' the fire. An' then it stepped to one side, an' I saw it, a black man, naked, rushin' into the cliff of gold. He worked fast, that boy. The light from the coals showed me just a blur of black motion as he chipped rocks from the ledge.

Then he turned and sprinted out.

I chuckled to myself. The boy had got my system. It was a cinch, nothin' to it.

An' then there came a yell of pain. The black man began to do a devil's dance, wavin' his hands and legs. He'd got right in front of me, within ten feet he was, an' I could just make him out when he moved.

From the ground there came a faint whisperin' noise, an' then I could sense things crawlin'. I felt my blood turn to luke-warm water as I thought of the danger I was in. If those ants found me there—

I was afraid to move, an' I was afraid to stand still.

But the black boy solved the problem for me. He made for a tree, climbin' up a creeper like a monkey. Up in the tree, I could hear his hands goin' as he tried to brush the ants off. And he kept up a low, moanin' noise, sort of a chatter of agony.

I couldn't tell whether the ants were leavin' him alone or whether they were watchin' the bottom of the tree, waitin' for him.

But the creeper that he'd climbed up stretched against the starlit sky almost in front of my nose. I could see it faintly outlined against the stars. And then I noticed that it was ripplin' an' swayin'. For a minute I couldn't make it out. Then I saw that

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those ants were swarmin' up the tree.

That was the end. The moanin' became a yellin', an' then things began to thud to the ground. That must be the gold rock the fellow had packed away with him, probably in a skin bag slung over his shoulder.

Then the sounds quit. Everything was silent. But I sensed the jungle was full of activity, a horrid activity that made me want to vomit. I could smell somethin' that must have been blood, an' there was a drip-drip from the tree branches.

Then the coals flickered up an' I could see a little more. The ground was black, swarmin'. The ants were goin' back and forth, up an' down the creepers, up into the tree.

Finally somethin' fell to the ground. It couldn't have been a man, because it was too small, hardly bigger than a hunk o' deer meat; but the firelight flickered on it, an' I could see that the heap was all of a quiver. An' it kept gettin' smaller an' smaller. Then I knew. The ants were finishin' their work.

I held my hands to my eyes, but I couldn't shut out the sight. If I'd moved I was afraid the ants would turn to me. I hadn't been across the dead line, but would the ants know it? I shuddered and turned sick.

After awhile I looked out again. The ground was bare. All of the ants were back in their pile of sticks. The last of the firelight flickered on a bunch o' white bones. Near by was the gleam of yellow metal—gold from the rocks the Tanti had stolen.

Sick, I went back along the trail, back to the camp, not tellin' anybody where I'd been or what I'd seen. I still wanted that gold, but I didn't want it the way I'd figured I did.

I DIDN'T sleep much. They gave me a tanned skin for a bed and that was all. It was up to me to make myself comfortable on the ground. The ground was hard, but my bunk on the ship had been hard. It was the memory of that little black heap that kept gettin' smaller an' smaller that tortured my mind.

I lived through the night, an' I lived through the days that followed; but I saw a lot that a white man shouldn't see. After all, I guess we think too much of life. Life didn't mean so much to those people, an' they didn't feel it was so blamed precious.

And I worked out a cinch scheme for the gold ledge. As the slave of Kk-Kk I had to assist her in feedin' the ants. Every night I had to bring up some of the fruit. Kk-Kk wouldn't let me feed it to 'em. It was the custom of the tribe that only the daugh-

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ter of the chief could feed the ants. But I got close enough to find out a lot.

Those ants were trained. Kk-Kk could walk among 'em an' they took no notice of her. She was the one who fed 'em. The old goldsmith could walk through 'em whenever he wanted to, an' they didn't pay any attention to him. They'd been trained that way. But nobody else could cross the deadline. Let any one else come closer than that an' they'd swarm out an' get started with their sickenin' business. Once they'd started there was no gettin' away.

I saw 'em at work a couple of times in the next week. They always managed to get behind the man at the gold ledge. Then they closed in on him. No matter how fast he ran they'd swarm up his legs as he went through 'em. Enough would get on him so he couldn't go far, an' there was always a solid formation of two-inch ants swarmin' behind, ready to finish the work.

But they fed 'em only one meal a day, in the afternoon. I got to figgerin' what would happen if there should be two feeders. They couldn't tell which was the official feeder, an' they'd been trained to let the official feeder go to the gold ledge.

I knew where they kept the pile of dried fruits that the ants liked so well. An' I started goin' out to the ant pile just before daybreak an' givin' 'em a breakfast. I'd take out a little of the fruit so there wouldn't be any crumbs left by the time the goldsmith came to work.

AT first I could see the ants were suspicious, but they ate the fruit. There was one long, woolly fellow that seemed to be the big boss, an' he reported to a glossy-backed ant that was a king or queen or somethin'. I got to be good friends with the boss. He'd come an' eat outa my hand. Then he'd go back an' wave his feelers at the king or queen, whichever it was, an' finally, the old boy, or old girl, got so it was all right. There was nothin' to it. I was jake a million, one of the regular guys. I could tell by a hundred little things, the way they waved their feelers, the way they came for the food. Oh, I got to know 'em pretty well.

All of this time Kk-Kk was teachin' me things about the life an' customs of the tribe. I could see she was friendly. She'd had to learn the language of the goldsmith, so that if anything should happen to him she could educate another one as soon as the tribe captured him.

For the tribe I didn't have no particular love. You should have seen 'em in some of their devil-devil dances, or seen 'em in the full moon when they gave a ban-

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quet to their cousins, the monkeys. Nope, I figured that anything I could do to the tribe was somethin' well done. But for Kk-Kk I had different feelin's, an' I could see that she had different feelin's for me.

An' all this time the monkey-man was jealous. He was in love with Kk-Kk, an' he wanted to buy her. In that country the woman didn't have anything to say about who she married, or whether she was wife No. 1 or No. 50. A man got his wives by buyin' 'em, and he could have as many as he could buy an' keep.

After a coupla weeks I commenced taking the gold. At first I just got closer an' closer to the dead line. I can yet feel the cold sweat there was on me the first time I crossed it. But the ants figgered I was a regular guy, part of the gang. They never said a word. Finally, I walked right up to the ledge, watchin' the ground behind me like a hawk. Then I scooped out some o' the crumbly quartz and worked the gold out of it. After that it was easy.

I didn't take much at any one time, because I didn't want the goldsmith to miss anything. I wasn't any hog. Ninety pounds I wanted, an' ninety pounds was all I was goin' to take, but I wasn't a fool. I was goin' to take it a little at a time.

CHAPTER 4
A Fanti Raid

THEN came the night of the big fight.

I was asleep, wrapped up in my skin robes, not because of the cold, because the nights are warm an' steamy down there, but to keep out as much of the damp as I could, an' to shut out the night insects.

There came a yell from a sentry up the pass, an' then a lot o' whoopin' an' then all hell broke loose.

There was a little moon, an' by the light o' that moon I could see things happenin'.

Our warriors came boilin' outa their huts. One thing, they didn't have to dress. All a guy had to do was grab a spear an' shield, or climb up a tree with a bow an' arrow, an' that was all there was to it. He was dressed an' ready for business.

They evidently had the thing all rehearsed, 'cause some of 'em guarded the trail with spears, an' used thick shields to ward off the poisoned arrows, an' others swarmed up in the trees an' shot little, poisoned arrows into the thick of the mass of men that were runnin' down the trail.

It was a funny fight. There wasn't any bangin' of firearms, but there was a lot o' yellin', an' in between yells could be heard the whispers of the arrows as they flitted through the night.

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After awhile I could see that our men were gettin' the worst of it. I was just a slave, an' when a fight started the women watched the slaves to see they didn't make a break for liberty, or start attackin' our boys from the rear.

Maybe I'd like to escape plenty, but I wanted to do it my own way, an' stickin' a spear in the back o' one of our boys didn't seem the way to do it. Then again, I wouldn't be any better off after I had escaped. My white skin would make trouble for me with the others. I wasn't the same as the other slaves, most of whom were Fantis anyway. They could make a break an' be among friends. If I made a hop I'd be outa the fryin' pan an' in the fire.

But I wasn't used to bein' a spectator on the side lines when there was fight goin' on. So I took a look at the situation.

When the alarm came in, the fire watchers had piled a lot of fagots on the big blaze, an' all the fight was goin' on by what light came from the fire. The fagots had burned off in the center an' there was a lot of flaming ends, fire on one side, stick on the other.

I whispers a few words to Kk-Kk, an' then we charged the fire, pickin' out the sticks, whirlin' 'em an' throwin' 'em into the mass o' savages that was borin' into our men.

She'd said somethin' to the slaves, an' they was all lined up, throwin' sticks too. They wasn't throwin' as wholeheartedly as Kk-Kk an' me was; but they was throwin' 'em, an' together we managed to keep the air full of brands.

It was a weird sight, those burnin' embers whirlin' an' spiralin' through the air, over the heads of our boys, an' plumb into the middle o' the Fanti outfit.

I seen that I'd missed a bet at that, though, because we was really tearin' the fire to pieces, an' it was goin' to get dark in a few minutes with the blaze all bein' thrown into the air that way.

One of our warriors had collected himself a poisoned arrow, an' he was sprawled out, shield an' spear lyin' aside of him. The arrows were whisperin' around pretty lively, an' I seen a couple of our slave fellows crumple up in a heap. That shield looked good to me, an' while I was reachin' for it, I got to wonderin' why not take the spear too. There wasn't anybody to tell me not to, so I grabbed 'em both, an' then I charged into the mêlée.

Them savages fought more or less silent after the first rush. There was plenty of yells, but they were individual, isolated yells, not no steady war cries. I'd picked a good time to strut my stuff, because there was more

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or less of a lull when I started my charge.

MY clothes had been torn off my back. What few rags remained I'd thrown away, wantin' to get like the natives as fast as possible. My skin was still white, although it had tanned up a bit, but there wasn't any mistakin' me.

Our boys had got accustomed to the idea of a white man bein' a slave, an' they hadn't run into the white men like the Fanti outfit had. Those Fantis had probably had a little white meat on their bill o' fare for a change o' diet; an' some expedition or other had come along an' mopped up on 'em. Anyhow, the idea of a white man as a fightin' machine had registered good an' strong with 'em.

So when they heard one awful yell, an' seen a naked white man chargin' down on 'em with spear an' shield, yellin' like a maniac, an' with all the whirlin' firebrands sailin' through the air, they thought it was time to quit.

They wavered for a second, then gave a lot of yells on their own an' started pell-mell down the trail, each one tryin' to walk all over the heels of the boy in front.

Funny thing about a bunch of men once turnin' tail to a fight. When they do it they get into a panic. It ain't fear like one man or two men would feel fear. It's a panic, a blind somethin' that keeps 'em from thinkin' or feelin'. All they want to do is to run. There ain't any fight left in 'em.

It was awful what our crowd done to those boys. As soon as they started to run, the laddies with the spears started making corpses. An' I was right in the lead o' our bunch. Don't ask me how I got them. I don't know. I only know I was yellin' an' chargin', when the whole Fanti outfit turned tail, an' there I was, playin' pig-stickin' with the backs of a lot o' runnin' Fanti warriors for targets.

We gave up the chase after awhile. We'd done enough damage, an' there was a chance o' trouble runnin' too far into the jungle. The crowd ahead might organize an' turn on us, an' we'd got pretty well strung out along the jungle trail.

I HERDED the boys back, an' there was a regular road o' Fanti dead between us an' where the main part o' the battle had taken place.

Well, they called a big powwow around the camp fire after that. I seen Kk-Kk talkin' to her old man, Yik-Yik, an' I guess she was pretty proud of her slave. Anyhow, Yik-Yik sucked his lips into his mouth like he did when he was thinkin', an' then he called to me.

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He got me in a ring o' warriors before the fire, an' he made a great speech. Then he handed me a bloody spear and shield, an' daubed my chest with some sort of paint, an' painted a coupla rings around my eyes, an' put three stripes o' paint on my cheeks.

Then all the warriors started jumpin' around the fire, stampin' their feet, wailin' some sort of a weird chant. Every few steps they'd all slam their feet down on the hard ground in unison, an' the leaves on the trees rattled with their stamping. It was a wild night.

Kk-Kk was interpreter. She told me they were givin' me my liberty an' adoptin' me into the tribe as a great warrior. It was not right that such a mighty fighter should be the slave of a woman, she told me.

Well, there's somethin' funny about women the world over. They all talk peace an' cooin' dove stuff, but they all like to see a son-of-a-gun of a good scrap. Kk-Kk's eyes were soft an' glowin' with pride, an' I could see she was as proud of me as though she'd been my mother or sweetheart or somethin'.

An' seein' that look in her eyes did somethin' to me. I'd been gettin' sorta sweet on Kk-Kk without knowin' it. She was a pretty enough lass for all her chocolate color. An' she was a square shooter. She'd stuck up for me from the first, an' if it hadn't been for her I'd have been a meal instead of a slave. It was only natural that I should get to like her more an' more. Then, when I'd got used to the native ideas an' all that, she got to lookin' pretty good to me.

ANYHOW, there I was in love with her—yes, an' I'm still in love with her. Maybe I did go native. What of it? There's worse things, an' Kk-Kk was a square shooter.

Oh, I know I'm an old man now. Kk-Kk is awful old now if she's livin', because those natives get old quickly, an' I ain't no spring chicken myself. But I love her just the same.

Well, a white man is funny about his women. He ain't got no patience. When he falls in love he falls strong, an' he wants his girl. I didn't have patience like the monkey-man had. I couldn't wait around. I went to Kk-Kk the next day an' told her about it.

It was at the ant meal time when we was packin' fruit to 'em. I was still helpin' her even if I wasn't a slave any more. I did it because I wanted to.

Well, I told her; her eyes got all shiny, an' she dropped the dried fruit in a heap an' threw her arms around my neck, an' she cried a bit, an' made soft noises in the graduated monkey

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talk that is the real language of the tribe. Bein' all excited that way, she forgot the language of the goldsmith an' went back to the talk of her folks.

The ants came an' got the fruit, an' they crawled all over our feet eatin' it. If she hadn't been so happy, an' if I hadn't been so much in love we'd both have realized what it meant, the ants crawlin' over us that way an' not offerin' to bite me, or actin' hostile at all. It showed that I'd been makin' friends with 'em on the side.

Well, after awhile she broke away, an' then she did some more cryin' an' explained that she was the daughter of the chief. The man that married her would be the chief of the tribe some day. That is, he'd be the husband of the tribe's queen.

Now in that tribe the men bought their wives. The man who married Kk-Kk was the man who'd buy her hand from her old man. But, bein' as she was the daughter of the chief, an' the future queen of the tribe, it'd take more wealth to buy her hand than any single man in the tribe could muster.

She told me how many skins an' how many hogs an' how much dried meat an' how many bows an' arrows an' spears, an' how many pounds of the native tobacco an' all that would be required.

I DIDN'T pay much attention to the long list of stuff she rattled off. I had over sixty pounds of pure gold cached then, an' I felt like a millionaire.

After all, what was all this native stuff compared with what I had? I was a rich man for a common, ordinary sailor boy. I could take that gold right then an' walk into any of the world's market places an' buy what I wanted. Yes, an' there's even been cases of women of the higher muck-a-mucks sellin' themselves for their daughters in marriage for less than sixty pounds of pure gold.

Well, I laughed at Kk-Kk an' told her not to worry. I'd buy her hand from the old man. I didn't worry about the price. I was a sailor lad, an' I had the hot blood of youth in my veins, an' I was in love with Kk-Kk, an' she was standin' there with her eyes all limpid an' misty an' her arms around my neck, an' I had sixty pounds of pure gold. What more could a man want?

An' then I heard a noise an' looked up.

There was the monkey-man, squattin' on the branch of a tree an' lookin' at us, and his lips were workin' back an' forth from his teeth. He wasn't sayin' a word, but his lips worked up an' down, an' every time they'd work, his teeth showed through.

I stiffened a bit, although it wasn't that I was afraid. Right

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then I felt that I could lick all the monkey-men in the world, either one at a time or all together.

Kk-Kk was frightened. I could feel the shivers runnin' up an' down her arms, an' she made little scared noises with her lips.

But the monkey-man didn't say anything. When he saw that we knew he was watchin', he reached up his great arms, caught the branch of a tree above him, swung off into space, caught another limb with his great feet, an' swirled off into the forest. All that was left was the twilight an' the chatterin' of a bunch of monkeys, an' the whimperin' noises Kk-Kk was makin'.

I PATTED the girl on the shoulder. Let the monkey-man storm around through the treetops. A lot of good that would do him. He wasn't in a position to buy the hand of Kk-Kk, an' he wasn't likely to be in the position. I had a big chunk of pure gold stored up. I didn't think it'd be any trick at all to complete the purchase.

By next day, though, I knew I was up against a funny problem. I had all the gold I could carry, but gold wasn't any good. I had enough of it to purchase a whole tannery full of choice skins, but I couldn't trade the gold for skins. The tribe I was with didn't care anything for the gold except as somethin' to trade to the Fanti boys. An' all the tradin' was done by the chief. The tribal custom prohibited the others from doin' any tradin', even from havin' any of the gold.

I commenced to see it wasn't as simple as I'd thought it was goin' to be.

An' all the while I got more an' more in love with Kk-Kk. She was just the sort of a woman a real adventurin' man wants. I'm tellin' you she was strong as an ox an' as graceful as a panther. A woman like that'd do with a man anywhere. An' she was sweet an' tender. When she thought I was blue for the white race an' home an' all that, she'd draw my head down against her breast an' croon to me as soft an' low as the wind sighin' through the tops of the jungle trees.

I wanted to take her away with me. Any one could see the tribe was doomed. The very gold that gave them their tradin' power was their curse. The Fantis desired that gold. They might get beat in one battle, might get beat in a thousand, but as long as the ledge was there, there'd be invaders fightin' to get possession of it.

It'd be only a question of time until the tribe was wiped out, defeated, captured, an' the women turned into slaves. They couldn't stand the climate in the interior. Four or five miles back from the

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ocean was their limit. The Fantis wanted that gold ledge. Every so often there'd be a battle, an' when it was over there'd be dead an' wounded. There was always plenty more of the enemy, but there was a few less of our boys after every fight.

If I could get away an' take Kk-Kk with me, an' a pack load of gold, what I could carry an' what Kk-Kk could carry, we'd be fixed for life. We could go out into the cities an' hold up our heads with any of 'em.

But I knew I was goin' to have trouble gettin'g Kk-Kk to see things that way. I might get her to leave with me, but she'd been brought up with the idea that her obligation to the tribe was sacred. She wouldn't take any of the gold. You see she hadn't ever had to deal with money, an' she did what she thought was right, not what she thought would make the most money for her.

While I was thinkin' things over, the monkey-man comes swingin' into the council an' tells 'em he's goin' to buy the hand of Kk-Kk at the next full moon. That was all he said. He wouldn't tell 'em where he was goin' to get the stuff or anything.

But it was enough to get me worried. An' it bothered Kk-Kk.

THERE was lots o' wild rumors goin' along in those days. There was a report that the Ashantis an' the Fantis were gettin' together for a joint attack. They was determined to get that gold ledge.

I tried to get Kk-Kk to advise the tribe to leave the thing. Without that gold they'd be safe from attack, an' the gold didn't mean so much to 'em anyhow.

But they were just like the rest of the nations, if a man could compare a savage tribe with a nation. They wanted their gold, even when it wasn't doin' the rank an' file of 'em any good. They were goin' to fight for it, lay down their lives for it if they had to, an' all the time only the ruler had any right to use the gold to trade with.

They knew they could have peace by goin' away. They must have seen they couldn't last long stayin' there. Every battle left 'em a little weaker. But no, they must stay an' die for their ledge of gold, an' they didn't even know the value of it. It's funny about gold that way.

There was another rumor goin' around that made me do a lot of thinkin', an' that was of a white man that was camped a couple of days march away. He had a big outfit with him, an' he was shootin' big game an' prospectin' around in general.

A wild idea got into my head that if I could sneak away an' get to him with fifty or sixty pounds of gold I could trade it for

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mirrors, guns, blankets an' what not that would look like a million dollars to the old chief. Then I could buy Kk-Kk an' maybe I could talk her into goin' away with me.

I really had enough gold, but I was gettin' a little hoggish. I wanted more. The love of a woman like Kk-Kk had ought to make a man richer than the richest king in the world, but I was a white man, an' I'd been taught to worship gold along with God.

In fact, I'd only had that God worship idea taught me on Sundays when I was a kid. On week days the god was gold. My folks had been rated as bein' pretty religious as common folks go. But even they hadn't tried to carry religion past Sunday. Gold was the god six days of the week, an' I'd been brought up with the white man's idea.

So I had to get me a little more gold. I wanted it so I could go to the white man's camp with all the gold I could carry an' still have as much left behind, hidden in the ground, waitin' for me to come back.

The next mornin' I decided to take a chance an' scoop out a big lot o' quartz. I got out with the food for the ants all right; I hadn't even thought about trouble with them for a long while. They'd quit bein' one of my worries. I walked over to the ledge and dug into the quartz.

An' then somethin' funny struck me. It was a feelin' like somethin' was borin' into my back. I whirled around an' there was the monkey-man sittin' on a limb, watchin' me.

He was up in a tree, squatted on the limb, his hands holdin' a bow with one of them poison arrows on the string an' it was then I noticed the way his toes came around the under side of the limb an' held him firm. Funny how a fellow 'll notice things like that when he's figurin' he has an appointment in eternity right away.

CHAPTER 5
The Monkey-Man

I STARED into the monkey-man's eyes, an' he stared back. I'd read somewhere that a white man always has the advantage over the other races because there's some kind of a racial inferiority that the other fellows develop in a pinch.

Maybe it's true, an' maybe it ain't. I only know I stared at the monkey-man, an' he fidgeted his fingers around on the bow string.

I was caught red-handed. One of those poison arrows would almost drop me in my tracks. I wouldn't have a chance to get outside of the dead line.

It looked like curtains for me. Then a funny thing happened. I thought at the time it was because of my starin' eyes an' the

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racial inferiority an' what not. Now I know the real reason. But the monkey-man lowered the bow, blinked his eyes a couple of times, just like a monkey puzzlin' over a new idea, an' then he reached up one of those long paws, grabbed a branch overhead, swung up into the higher trees an' was off.

It looked like he'd gone to get some witnesses, an' it was up to me to bury my gold an' be snappy about it. I could see the ants were finishin' up the last of the feed I'd given 'em, an' I wouldn't have to be afraid of some of that bein' left.

I took the gold an' sprinted for the place where I kept it hid. I buried the new batch with the other, an' then strolled back to the clearin', tryin' to look innocent.

I felt a big weight on my chest. Somehow I felt the monkey-man was goin' to get me. If he could make his charges stick I was sure due to be a meal before night.

But the funny part of it was he didn't make any charges. He even wasn't there at all. Funny. I walked around an' passed the few words of the language I'd picked up with some of the warriors, an' then I saw Kk-Kk.

IT was sort of a lazy life, livin' there that way. The tradin' power of the gold ornaments gave the tribe the bulge on things. They didn't have to work so awful hard. Funny, too, they didn't savvy rightly about the gold. They thought it wasn't the metal, but the way the goldsmith worked it up into rings an' bracelets an' such like that made it valuable. Gold as such they couldn't understand.

Anyhow, the warriors didn't have anything to do except a little huntin' once in awhile. The women did all of the real work, an' there wasn't much of that.

Kk-Kk an' me walked down to the beach an' I watched the green surf thunderin' in. Her arm was nestled around me an' her head was up against my shoulder. I felt a possessory sort of feelin' like I owned the whole world. I patted her head an' told her there wasn't anything to be afraid of, that I was goin' to make good on buyin' her an' that I'd boost any price the monkey-man was able to raise.

She felt curious, but when she seen I didn't want to answer questions she let things go without talkin'. She was wonderful.

I broke away from her when the sun was well up. I knew she'd go down to the ocean with the tribe for her bath.

That was my chance. I raced into the jungle to the place where I'd left my gold.

ALL that a man could pack away was gone. There wasn't over twenty pounds left. The

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ground had been dug up an' the gold rooted up. It was there in the sun, glistenin' soft an' yellow against the green of the jungle an' the rich brown of the earth.

For a minute my heart made a flip-flop, an' then I knew. The monkey-man hadn't given the alarm at all. He'd come to know somethin' of the power of the gold, an' when he saw me feedin' the ants an' helpin' myself at the gold ledge he realized I must have a bunch of it cached away. That had been why he hadn't shot me with a poisoned arrow. He'd swung up out of sight in the high trees an' waited for me to lead him to the place where I'd buried the gold. With his trainin' in slippin' through the branches of the trees there hadn't been anything to it. He followed me as easy as a bird could flit through the branches.

Now he'd taken all the gold he could carry. He'd been in a hurry. He hadn't stopped to bury the rest some place else, even, or to cover it over with earth. Why? There was only one answer. He'd made a bluff about buyin' Kk-Kk from her old man, an' he wanted to make good. He'd heard about the white man an' his camp, an' he'd got the same idea I'd had, an' he'd got a head start on me.

I had a skin pouch with a couple of straps goin' over the shoulders. I loaded the gold that was left in it an' made my start. I knew there'd be trouble gettin' past the sentries at the bottleneck, but I couldn't wait for night. The monkey-man could slip through in the trees. I'd have to rely on bluff and nerve.

It wasn't gettin' past 'em that was the hard part. It was carryin' the gold out. As a warrior, I was entitled to go out in the jungle to hunt, to come an' go as I pleased. It was what was in that skin pouch that would make the trouble.

Then I got another idea. There'd been a kill the day before of some little sort of an antelope that ran around the jungle. I knew where some of the meat was. The gold didn't amount to much in size, an' I raced over an' stuffed some animal meat on the top of it. It was sink or swim, an' I couldn't wait to fix up a plan.

I grabbed a spear an' a shield an' started down the path. The sentries flashed their white teeth at me an' blinked their round eyes. Then one of 'em noticed the pack on my back an' he flopped his spear down while he came over to investigate.

I didn't act like I was the least bit frightened. I even opened the sack myself, an' I made a lot of motions. I pointed to the sun, an' I swung my hand up an' down four times tellin' 'em that I'd be away four days. Then I pointed to the meat an' to my mouth, explainin' that it was for food.

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It was a cinch. I was on my way, headin' into hostile territory, knowin' that the Fantis were in the country an' that I'd be a fine meal for 'em.

After I got into the country where the white men went, the color of my skin should protect me from the tribes. The white man gets respect from the blacks. He kills a lot of blacks to do it, but he gets results.

It was the first few miles that had me worried. I had to go through the Eso country an' into the Nitchwa country, an' I was in a hurry. I couldn't go slow an' cautious like, an' I couldn't take to the trees like the monkey-man could.

THE first day I almost got caught. A bunch of Fanti warriors came down the trail. I swung off to one side, workin' my way into the thickest of the jungle, an' hidin' in the shadows. I thought sure I was caught, because those boys have eyes that can see in the dark. But I got by.

The second day I didn't see a soul. I was gettin' in a more open, rollin' country, an' I only had a general idea where I was goin'. There was a hill that stood up pretty well over the rest of the country, an' I got up on that an' climbed a tree.

Just at dusk I see 'em, hundreds of fires twinklin' through the dusk like little stars. I figgered that 'd be the camp of the white man.

It ain't healthy to go through the jungle at night. There are too many animals who have picked up the habits of man an' figger that turn-about is fair play. They relish the flesh of a man, more particularly a white man.

For two hours I worked through the country with eyes glarin' out of the jungle all around, an' soft steps fallin' into the trail behind me. They were animals, stalkin' along behind, a little afraid of the white man smell, hesitatin' a bit about closin' the gap an' makin' a supper outa me, but feelin' their mouths water at the thought.

Finally I came to the camp of the white man. I could see him sittin' there, all bearded an' tanned. He was wearin' white clothes an' sittin' before a fire with a lot o' native servants waitin' around with food an' drink an' what not.

I walked up to him, pretty well all in, an' motioned to my mouth. I'd been so used to talkin' to the natives that way that for a moment I forgot that this man talked my language.

Then I told him. "I come to trade," I says, an' dumped out the gold on the ground.

He went up outa the canvas chair like he'd been shot.

"Another one!" he yelled. "An' this one's white!"

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Then he clapped his hands, an' black men came runnin' up an' grabbed me.

"Where did yuh get it? Where is it? Is there any more? How long will it take to get there?" he yells at me, his face all purple, with the veins standin' out an' the eyes bulgin'.

I'd forgotten how excited white men got at the sight of gold.

"Gold! Gold!" he goes on. "The country must be lousy with gold! There was a big ape hanging around camp this morning. He seemed a higher species of ape, almost human. I stalked him and shot him for a specimen. Can you imagine my surprise when I found that he was carrying a skin filled with gold?

"And this is the same gold. I'd recognize it anywhere. Come, my good man, come and tell me if you have ever seen a similar creature to this great ape. I have preserved him in alcohol and intend to carry him intact to the British Museum."

I COULD feel myself turnin' sorta sick at the idea, but there was nothin' for it. He was draggin' me along to a big vat. There was the monkey-man, a bullet hole in his back—in his back, mind you. He hadn't even shot him from the front, but had sneaked around to the rear. The "specimen" was floatin' around in the alcohol.

I turned away in disgust.

"Tell me, tell me," pleads the guy, "do you know him? Your gold comes from the same source. Perhaps you have seen others of the same species.

"After I shot him I was overcome with remorse because he might have showed me the way to the gold deposit if I had merely captured him. But I shot before I knew of the gold."

I did some rapid thinkin'. If this bird thought I knew where the gold came from he'd force me to show him, or perhaps he'd kill me an' stick me in alcohol. So I looked sad.

"No, I don't know," I tells him. "I saw this man-monkey carryin' a skin full of somethin' heavy. I followed along until he sat down the sack an' went to sleep. Then I sneaked up, seen it was gold, an' figgered a monkey-man didn't have no use for gold."

He nods his head. "Quite right, my friend. Quite right. A monkey can have no use for gold. And how about yourself? You possibly have no use for it. At any rate you admit it was part of the gold that belonged to the monkey, so you should restore it to the original pile, and I will take charge of it."

I seen this bird was one of the kind that want everything for nothin' an' insist that a guy must not hold out on 'em.

I told him that I'm only too

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glad to oblige, but I want some calicos an' some mirrors an' blankets an' a gun an' some ammunition, an' some huntin' knives an' beads. After that he can have the gold.

We dickered for awhile, an' finally I dusted out, takin' two porters with me, frightened to death but loaded down with junk. I was carryin' the rifle, an' I was watchin' my back trail. The old boy might figure I was a specimen.

I got back all right. We had one brush with the Fanti outfit, but the roar of the gun made 'em take to the tall timber. I had the porters lay the junk down about two miles from the place where our tribe was camped, an' I sneaked it up to the bottle-neck myself, carryin' three loads of it. Then I came on up to the sentries, shook hands, walked past an' got a couple of warriors to help me with the plunder.

Kk-Kk was there, all dolled up in all her finery, paradin' around the village. That's a custom they got from the Fantis. When a girl's offered for sale in marriage she decks herself out with everything the family's got an' parades around the village. That's a notice to bidders.

I knew Kk-Kk was doin' it for me. She had to comply with the customs of the tribe, but she figgered I was the only bird that could make the grade an' she trusted to my resourcefulness to bring home the bacon.

CHAPTER 6
African Justice

MY stuff was a riot. When I had the fellows spread it out on the ground the boys' eyes stuck out until their foreheads bulged. Most of 'em had never seen the trade goods of the white man. They'd been kept pretty well isolated with the hostile Fanti outfit hemmin' 'em in by land an' the open ocean thunderin' on the beach.

The knives made the hit. The warriors were hunters enough to appreciate a keen-edged bit of shiny steel. The blankets didn't take very well, neither did the calico, but the knives, the mirrors an' the beads were drawin' cards that couldn't be beat.

Old Yik-Yik screwed up his eyes an' sucked in his mouth, the way he had when he was thinkin', an' then he jabbers out a bunch of graduated monkey talk. The goldsmith was there an' he blinks his rheumy eyes an' sticks out his hand.

"The old bird says you've bought the girl" he tells me.

I could feel my heart do a flip-flop. It was all matter-of-fact to them, the buyin' of a wife, even if she did happen to be the future queen of the tribe. But to me there was only one Kk-Kk in the world, an' now she was to be

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mine. The only man that knew my secret was the monkey-man, an' he was floatin' around in a vat of alcohol. I could settle down in the tribe an' be happy the rest of my life.

But, in spite of it all, I was feelin' off color. My head felt light. When I'd turn it quick it seemed to keep right on goin' for a couple of revolutions. An' my feet felt funny, as though they wasn't settin' firm on the ground.

But what of it? Wasn't I goin' to marry Kk-Kk? What was a little biliousness more or less?

An' then there was a bunch o' yellin'. I looked up an' seen a couple of the sentries bringin' in a captive. Another meal, I thought to myself, wonderin' if maybe he'd be in time to furnish the spread at the weddin' feast.

I looked again, an' then my mouth got all dry an' fuzzy.

It was one of the porters that had carried out my stuff. Probably he had sneaked back to try an' find the gold, or else some of the hunters had caught him. In either event my hash was cooked. When he told 'em what I'd traded to the white man—

I strained my ears. Some of our crowd talked Fanti, an' maybe the porter talked it. He did. I heard 'em jabberin' away, an' the porter pointed at me an' at the stuff on the ground.

I stole a look at Yik-Yik. His eyes was as hard as a couple of glass beads, an' his lips was all sucked in until his mouth was just a network of puckered wrinkles.

He spits out some words an' a circle forms around me. The goldsmith was still there an' he kept right on actin' as interpreter, but I didn't need to follow half what he said.

An' then, all of a sudden, I stiffened up to real attention. It seemed the old man was accusin' Kk-Kk o' betrayin' the tribe.

For a minute or two I thought he'd gone clean cuckoo, an' then I seen just how it looked to him. Kk-Kk was in love with me. The monkey-man, who she didn't like, had threatened to buy her. There was a white man in the country. What was more likely than that she'd slipped me out a bunch of gold?

I TRIED to tell 'em, but they would not listen. Kk-Kk looked all white around the gills for a minute, an' then she walked over to my side.

"We shall meet death together," she said, dignified as a queen had ought to be. But I wasn't goin' to stand for it.

I tried to tell 'em about how I had the ants trained. I volunteered to show 'em. I tried to get 'em to feed me to the ants. But they wouldn't listen to me. Kk-Kk was the only one they'd listen to, an' she wouldn't say a word.

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She wanted to die with me.

Then was when I knew I was sick. The whole ground started reelin' around, an' I felt so drowsy I could hardly hold my eyes open. My head was burnin' an' throbbin' an' it seemed as though the damp odors of the jungle was soaked all through my blood an' was smotherin' me under a blanket of jungle mist.

Their voices sounded farther an' farther away.

I heard the goldsmith tellin' me the sentence the chief was pronouncin'. He had to lean up against my ear an' shout to make me understand.

It seemed they had a funny bread made out of some berries an' roots. When a fellow ate it he lost his memory.

The old king had decided not to kill us, but to feed us his bread an' banish us from the tribe.

Since we'd committed the crime against the tribe because we wanted to marry, it seemed like proper justice for the old boy to feed us *king-kee,* the bread of forgetfulness, so we wouldn't ever remember about the other.

It was a horrible punishment. If I hadn't been comin' down sick I'd have made a break an' forced 'em to kill me, or turned loose with the rifle an' seen if I couldn't have escaped with Kk-Kk.

But I was a sick man. I felt 'em stuffin' somethin' in my mouth, an' I swallowed mechanically an' cried for water.

Then I remember seein' Kk-Kk's eyes, all misty an' floatin' with tears, bendin' over me. Then I sank into a sleep or stupor.

Lord knows how much later I began to come to. I was in Cape Coast Castle. They told me some natives had brought me on a stretcher, sat me down before the door of the buildin' where they kept the medicines, an' gone away. It had been done at night. They found me there the next mornin' sick with the sleepin' sickness.

When I woke up I couldn't tell 'em who I was, where I'd been, or how I got there. I only knew I wanted somethin' an' couldn't tell what it was.

A BOAT came in, an' they slipped me on her. The surgeon aboard got interested in my case. Every time it rained I'd sleep. There was somethin' in the smell of dampness in the air.

He treated me like I'd been a king, an' took me to Boston. There was some German doctor there that had specialized on tropical fevers. They had me there for six months studyin' my case.

The doctor told me I was victim of what he called auto-hypnosis. He said I went to sleep when it rained because I thought of sleep when it rained.

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I told him it was the fever in my blood comin' out when it got damp, but he just shook his head an' said auto-hypnosis, whatever that might mean.

He tried for six months to get me over it, an' then he gave it up as a bad job.

He said for me to come to California or Arizona an' get out in the desert, where it only rained once or twice a year, an' to always be in my tent when it rained.

I followed his advice. For fifty years now I've been livin' out here in the desert.

Every time it rains an' I smell the damp air, it acts on me like the jungle smells when I had the sleepin' sickness, an' I got to sleep. Sometimes I fall asleep and don't waken for two weeks at a stretch.

But it's funny about me. Now that I'm gettin' old, my memory's comin' back to me. Particularly after I wake up, I can recall everything like I've just told it to you.

Of course I'm an old man now, nothin' but a bum of a desert rat, out here scratchin' around in the sand an' sagebrush for a few colors of gold. I got me a placer staked out over there at the base of that hill.

Ain't it funny that I have to spend my life lookin' for gold, when it was grabbin' the gold in big chunks that made all my troubles; Oh, well, it's all in a lifetime.

Of course I'm too old to be thinkin' of such things now. But I get awful lonesome for Kk-Kk. I can see her round, liquid eyes shinin' at me whenever I wake up from one of these long sleeps. I wonder if she's got her memory comin' back, now that she's gettin' old—an' I wonder if she ever thinks of me—

Yes, sir. Thankee, sir. Another cup of that coffee will go kinda good. When a man's been asleep for eight or nine days he wakes up sorta slow. I'll drink this coffee an' then I'll be headin' over toward my placer claim.

I'm sorry I bothered you folks, but that rain came up mighty sudden, an' the first thing I knew I was soakin' wet an' sleepy, smellin' the damp smell of the earth an' the desert stuff. I crawled in this bunch of Joshuay palms, an' that's the last I remember until you came along an' poured the hot coffee down me.

No, thanks, I don't believe I'll stay any longer.

My tent's fixed up mighty comfortable over there, an' when I wake up this way it seems like I've been with Kk-Kk in a dream world. I like to think about my lost sweetheart.

So long, boys. Thanks for the coffee.

THE END

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Illustrator
SUMMERS

The bald eagle and the whooping crane are vanishing. Songbirds are dying by the millions. In Africa, the herds thin out each year. And have you been to the zoo lately?

Possible to Rue

By PIERS ANTHONY

I WANT a Pegasus, Daddy," Junior greeted him at the door, his curly blond head bobbling with excitement. "A small one, with white fluttery wings and an aerodynamic tail and—"

"You shall have it, son," Daddy said warmly, absent-mindedly stripping off jacket and tie. Next week was Bradley Newton, Jr.'s sixth birthday, and Bradley, Senior had promised a copy of *Now We Are Six* and a pet for his very own. Newton was a man of means, so that this was no empty pledge. He felt he owed it to the boy, to make up in some token the sorrow of Mrs. N's untimely departure.

He eased himself into the upholstered chair, vaguely pleased that his son showed such imagination. Another child would have demanded something commonplace, like a mongrel or a Shetland pony. But a pegasus now—

"Do you mean the winged horse, son?" Newton inquired, a thin needle of doubt poking into his complacency.

"That's right, Daddy," Junior said brightly. "But it will have to be a very small one, because I want a pegasus that can really

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fly. A full grown animal's wings are non-functional because the proportionate wing span is insufficient to get it off the ground."

"I understand, son," Newton said quickly. "A small one." People had laughed when he had insisted that Junior's nurse have a graduate degree in general science. Fortunately he had been able to obtain one inexpensively by hiring her away from the school board. At this moment he regretted that it was her day off; Junior could be very single-minded.

"Look, son," he temporized. "I'm not sure I know where to buy a horse like that. And you'll have to know how to feed it and care for it, otherwise it would get sick and die. You wouldn't want that to happen, would you?"

The boy pondered. "You're right, Daddy," he said at last. "We would be well advised to look it up."

"Look it up?"

"In the encyclopedia, Daddy. Haven't you always told me that it was an authoritative factual reference?"

The light dawned. Junior believed in the encyclopedia. "My very words, Son. Let's look it up and see what it says about . . . let's see . . . here's *Opinion to Possibility* . . . should be in this volume. Yes." He found the place and read aloud: " 'Pegasus —Horse with wings which sprang from the blood of the Gorgon Medusa after Perseus cut off her head.' "

JUNIOR's little mouth dropped open. "That has got to be figurative," he pronounced. "Horses are not created from—"

" '. . . a creature of Greek mythology',' Newton finished victoriously.

Junior digested that. "You mean, it doesn't exist," he said dispiritedly. Then he brightened. "Daddy, if I ask for something that does exist, then can I have it for a pet?"

"Certainly, Son. We'll just look it up here, and if the book says it's real, we'll go out and get one. I think that's a fair bargain."

"A unicorn," Junior said.

Newton restrained a smile. He reached for the volume marked *Trust to Wary* and flipped the pages. " 'Unicorn—A mythological creature resembling a horse —' " he began.

Junior looked at him suspiciously. "Next year I'm going to school and learn to read for myself," he muttered. "You are alleging that there is no such animal?"

"That's what the book says, Son—honest."

The boy looked dubious, but decided not to make an issue of it. "All right—let's try a zebra." He watched while Newton pulled out *Watchful to Indices*. "It's

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only fair to warn you, Daddy," he said ominously, "that there is a picture of one on the last page of my alphabet book."

"I'll read you just exactly what it says, Son," Newton said defensively. "Here it is: 'Zebra—A striped horse-like animal reputed to have lived in Africa. Common in European and American legend, although entirely mythical—' "

"Now you're making that up," Junior accused angrily. "I've got a picture."

"But Son—I thought it was real myself. I've never seen a zebra, but I thought—look. You have a picture of a ghost too, don't you? But you know that's not real."

There was a hard set to Junior's jaw. "The examples are not analogous. Spirits are preternatural—"

"Why don't we try another animal?" Newton cut in. "We can come back to the zebra later."

"Mule," Junior said sullenly.

Newton reddened, then realized that the boy was not being personal. He withdrew the volume covering *Morphine to Opiate* silently. He was somewhat shaken up by the turn events had taken. Imagine spending all his life believing in an animal that didn't exist. Yet of course it was stupid to swear by a horse with prison stripes. . . .

" 'Mule'," he read. " 'The offspring of the mare and the male ass. A very large, strong hybrid, sure footed with remarkable sagacity. A creature of folklore, although, like the unicorn and zebra, widely accepted by the credulous. . . .' "

His son looked at him. "Horse," he said.

Newton somewhat warily opened *Hoax to Imaginary*. He was glad he wasn't credulous himself. "Right you are, Son. 'Horse—A fabled hoofed creature prevalent in mythology. A very fleet four-footed animal complete with flowing mane, hairy tail and benevolent disposition. Metallic shoes supposedly worn by the animal are valued as good luck charms, in much the same manner as the unicorn's horn—' "

JUNIOR clouded up dangerously. "Now wait a minute, Son," Newton spluttered. "I know that's wrong. I've seen horses myself. Why, they use them in TV westerns—"

"The reasoning is specious," Junior muttered but his heart wasn't in it.

"Look, Son—I'll prove it. I'll call the race track. I used to place—I mean, I used to go there to see the horses. Maybe they'll let us visit the stables." Newton dialed with a quivering finger; spoke into the phone. A brief frustrated interchange later he

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slammed the receiver down again. "They race dogs now," he said.

He fumbled through the yellow pages, refusing to let himself think. The book skipped rebelliously from *Homes* to *Hospital.* He rattled the bar for the operator to demand the number of the nearest horse farm, then angrily dialed "O"; after some confusion he ended up talking to "Horsepower, Inc.", a tractor dealer.

Junior surveyed the proceedings with profound disgust. "Methinks the queen protests too much," he quoted sweetly.

In desperation, Newton called a neighbor. "Listen, Sam—do you know anybody around here who owns a horse? I promised my boy I'd show him one today. . . ."

Sam's laughter echoed back over the wire. "You're a card, Brad. Horses, yet. Do you teach him to believe in fairies too?"

Newton reluctantly accepted defeat. "I guess I was wrong about the horse, Son," he said awkwardly. "I could have sworn —but never mind. Just proves a man is never too old to make a mistake. Why don't you pick something else for your pet? Tell you—whatever you choose, I'll give you a matched pair."

Junior cheered up somewhat. He was quick to recognise a net gain. "How about a bird?"

Newton smiled in heartfelt relief. "That would be fine, Son, just fine. What kind did you have in mind?"

"Well," Junior said thoughtfully. "I think I'd like a big bird. A real big bird, like a roc, or maybe a harpy—"

Newton reached for *Possible to Rue.*

THE END

SURVIVAL PACKAGES

(*Continued from page 74*)

punched in a metal brain long ago, you will see the twin robots carrying the complete bones of a child between them, wandering—wandering far and wide. And they go confused. It will pass. The metal punched in their brains must sooner or later give way. It was metal of a century ago. Then not even the robots will wander. And we will be left to only our own fears and only our own Deep Thinking, each in our own fortress Walls, warily watching each other, half expecting a sneak attack from a neighbor at any time, but "knowing" a massive overwhelming space-strike from some far galaxy may be our final fate, after all. But living! LIVING! and dedicated to the survival of man at all costs.

THE END

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FANTASY BOOKS

By S. E. COTTS

The Frankenstein Reader. *Edited by Calvin Beck. Ballantine Books. Paper: 50¢.*

Be not misled! This is not a group of stories featuring Frankenstein, but a collection of eleven varied tales by writers like H. G. Wells, Charles Dickens and Robert Louis Stevenson. In spite of such an illustrious cast of authors, it is not an outstanding anthology, but an average one. Only four of the offerings are of good to excellent quality; the remainder vary from so-so to bad.

The finest tale is probably "On the Staircase," by Katharine F. Gerould. A ghost story told with great skill, it is made even more scary by virtue of the fact that the ghosts turn out to be from the future rather than the past.

Two stories run a close second to Miss Gerould's. They are "The Middle Toe of the Right Foot," by Ambrose Bierce and "The Four-Fifteen Express," by Amelia Edwards. Both are very good, indeed. The Bierce story details the strange events leading up to the death of a man who had killed his wife and two children ten years previously. The Edwards tale recounts the circuitous way in which a dead man is cleared of embezzlement charges.

Next in descending order would probably come to the H. G. Wells story, "The Ghost of Fear." It tells how a cynic of scientific inclination sleeps in a supposedly haunted room on a dare, and what his experience is there.

A story with a good deal of charm but very little substance is Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch's "A Pair of Hands." It tells of the house-wifely tendencies of a seven-year-old girl ghost, and her relationship with the two ladies living in the house that receives her ministrations.

"The Thing in the Hall," by E. F. Benson, is an example of a misfortune too often encountered: the story that begins promisingly, but whose ending is weak and unconvincing. It concerns two doctors who are always seeking out the curious, and what happens when they begin encountering some unexplainable phenomena.

In the so-so-category are four stories. Two, Charles Dickens' "The Trial for Murder" and Robert Chambers' "Passeur," are distinguished by good prose, but the plots leave something to be desired. In Dickens' case, the

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constant appearance of a murder victim's ghost at the trial of his murderer, and the manner in which he assists in convicting this murderer for the crime, are too matter-of-fact to be scary or suspenseful. In the case of Chambers, the fault is the opposite one. Instead of a matter-of-fact approach, he tells his story of a man who hears the voice of a lost love, in a far-too-vague fashion. It was probably intended as a Symbolic tour de force (the ferryman of the mythical River Styx), but it is just plain wispy, instead.

There are two other stories in this unexceptional category. "The Dead Valley," by Ralph Adams Cram, is about the struggle of two boys to escape from a strange, misty valley. The pages are filled with various intimations of shrieks and other such things too terrible to describe, but they are never more than intimations, and so one's reaction is negative.

The other is Robert Louis Stevenson's "The Isle of Voices." The emphasis here is on voodoo and native magic, and while these things can be blood-curdling, Stevenson's use of them here is so fantastical as to border on the ridiculous.

The remaining story, Richard Middleton's "The Ghost Ship," is better left ignored by both reviewer and reader.

The Fiend in You. *Edited by Charles Beaumont. 158 pp. Ballantine Books. Paper: 50¢.*

This is Charles Beaumont's debut as an anthologist, and it proves to be a very auspicious one. In addition to his editing chores, he contributes a fine story. In fact, all the stories are unusually fine, and any one of them would put to shame even the three best tales from the above-mentioned *Frankenstein Reader*. There are sixteen stories in all, mostly new to book form, and they are by such solid-gold writers as Henry Slesar, Richard Matheson (two), Ray Bradbury, Fritz Leiber, etc. An extra bonus is supplied in the form of the editor's timely introductions to each entry.

In an excellent preface to the book, Beaumont unknowingly puts into words much better than I ever could, the reason why such stories as he has collected here are scarier than the ones discussed previously. It is because the "modern" horror story relies more on that Monster called the Mind, rather than on werewolves, rattling chains or ghosts.

Here, then, are some samples to whet the appetite.

"Fool's Mate," by Stanley Ellin, is a virtuoso performance. In it, a hen-pecked husband's need for a chess partner leads him to an imaginative creation of one, with drastic results.

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In Charles Fritch's "Big Wide Wonderful World," a group of teen-age boys wish themselves nightmares, again with shocking results.

Whit Burnett's "Night of the Gran Baile Mascara" is about Toledo, Spain, and an American tourist who has a disastrous encounter with a character from a Velazquez painting.

"A Punishment to Fit the Crimes," by Richard Gordon, is a somber, documentary-like recreation of the trial of Jack the Ripper. The setting is Hell, and his punishment is a la Sartre's play, *No Exit*.

In "The Hornet," George Johnson shows the dangers of such insects when combined with marital quarrels, neither of which anyone should ever need to be warned of again.

Beaumont's own entry, "Perchance to Dream," which falls in the middle of the book, is about a man who (contrary to most of us) seeks sleeplessness because of the dire consequences he knows await him in Dreamland.

"The Thirteenth Step," by Fritz Leiber, takes place at a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous. The disbelief of some cynical members causes a young girl to prove that stories of her early life are all too true.

In "The Conspiracy," Robert Lowry shows that those things which seem ludicrous in the beginning can have horrible consequences. For example, an elderly drunken woman won't leave a young couple alone.

Esther Carlson's sad tale, "Room with a View," details the descent from rationality to insanity of an artist who, depressed with his surroundings, converts his apartment into a sailing yacht.

In "The Candidate," Henry Slesar has a real chiller. Want to join a secret society which can wish anyone (chosen by a member) to death?

William Nolan's wacky variation on "dog days," entitled (appropriately enough) "One of Those Days," furnishes a welcome lessening of tension before the last fingernail is gnawed down to the quick.

"Lucy Comes to Stay," by Robert Bloch, is again about drinking, the third one here so far. Were some of these gentlemen tossing their ideas around at the local pub one night? In this tale, the alcohol results in certain unpleasant delusions.

Bradbury's contribution, "The Women," pits a girl against the sea, which she senses as feminine and out to capture her lover.

"Surprise," by Ronald Bradford, features a serpent as scheming as the one from the Garden of Eden, but in this story, the

(*Continued on page 128*)

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(*Continued from page 4*)

tist, I was squeezed between hot and sweaty people. In my naivete, I fully expected to be able to read part of FANTASTIC as I merrily bounced back and forth between the people (it was rush hour) but obviously I was having no such luck.

As I watched the stations go by, I couldn't help noticing a young man squeezed beside me who was reading a paperback. Getting just a glimpse of the blurb, I caught the snatch ". . . by Algis Budrys . . . ." which interested me. I was curious to learn the name of the book he was reading, and perhaps strike up a conversation with him, but to no avail. Some people are forward and strike up a conversation with a stranger easily, but I could not do it. And then, I had a glimmer of inspiration. I got out my FANTASTIC, opened it, and held the cover right up in his face so that he could see it, while I pretended to read it. Naturally, I hoped that he would say something to *me*. I coughed a few times, and he finally looked up. He saw the cover. Our eyes met; and after staring at each other a full minute, I finally got up the courage to speak. But, just as I started to open my mouth, hopefully anticipating that he was a fan, he resumed his reading, which was downright rude! At this point I reached my destination and got off the train, fully sickened. Why a thing like that should bother me, I don't know, but it seems to happen all the time. Now, as I reach the end of my narrative, I would just like to say that I am most certainly NOT a blithering idiot, as the previous passage might logically seem to indicate.

I can't help mentioning the fact that the cover was effective, although the inveterate Miss Crunk may deem this point totally irrelevant. However, I think the cover contributes much to the magazine. Of course the inside should be as good as the outside, but after all the cover is the thing that first attracts browsing people to the magazine, and this is the thing which motivates them to look further . . . or not to. Therefore I think the cover should be given much more emphasis than you seem to think, and although I've seen much better artwork than on the January issue, I do believe that this WAS the type of cover which would cause one to be attracted to it, and to de-shelve it and investigate its contents.

I enjoyed the "Three Tales For The Horrid At Heart," though the second did not have "an unexpected ending". They were somewhat common in their themes, but very enjoyable, and

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quite different from anything you've published in quite a while. Your magazine, seems to me, tends to change radically with each issue. This may be a silly illusion, but I somehow do not experience this with AMAZING, or other promags. By the way, please keep up the Classic series, which is quite worthwhile. I still think "Titan" was one of the best reprints that you've featured in quite a while.

Glad to see you're keeping Jack Sharkey in your pages, I've liked everything I've read by him, including the recent "It's Magic, You Dope!" It was much different from anything I've read in your pages before. This seems to apply to much of your material, and this is why I say each issue is quite different.

Up to now everything I had read by Roger Zelazny was confusing, nonsensical strings of words . . . but "On The Road To Splenoba" is particularly excellent, as it takes up an all too familiar subject which is quite time-worn, and makes quite a new thing of it. Very well done.

David T. Keil
38 Slocum Crescent
Forest Hills 75, N.Y.

● *If there is more variation in* Fantastic *than in* Amazing *it's due to the wider variety of fantasy material-and writers.*

Dear Editor:

In "Third Sister," page 111, we find; ". . . she was only thirty when it happened. I was eight . . ." Or in other words, 22 years difference, right? Now on page 114 we read; "She is still there . . . A . . . woman of ninety-eight . . . I am a barren spinster of seventy-nine . . ." I figure that's 19 years difference.

Can Mr. Porges explain how his heroine gained 3 years on her mother during the course of the story? Even fantasy is supposed to supply a reason for such fantastic occurrences.

Robert Coulson
Route 3
Wabash, Ind.

● *Time Dilatation effect.*

(*Continued from page 126*)
serpent used to be a man.

The collection ends with a selection by Richard Matheson, even as it opened with the same author. The two are entitled "Finger Prints" and "Mute." They are very fitting stories for their particular places in the book. They both deal with people who can't speak. But in the first story this defect is turned into a kind of perversion, while in the last one it is overcome to provide, believe it or not, a happy, healthy ending.

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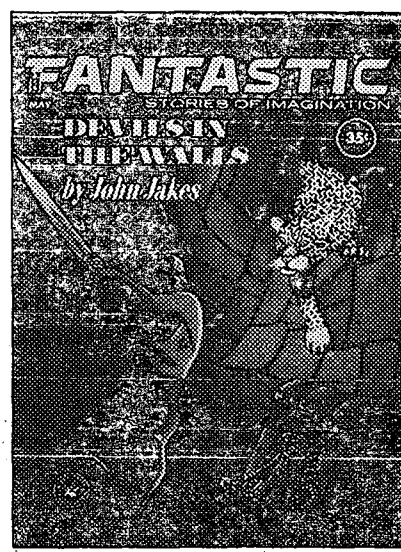
Ron Goulart's *Anything for Laughs*, which describes the travails of a court jester on a planet at the Galaxy's frontier; and *The Message*, an absorbing novelet of mysterious events in ancient China, are also featured in the May issue.



Other stories, plus the usual departments, round out a FANTASTIC not to be missed—if for nothing else than another eerie Kramer cover (above.) The May FANTASTIC goes on sale at newsstands April 23. Reserve your copy now.

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